Henrietta J. Butler

(Grillé)

THE

CHRONICLES OF WALTHAM.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE SUBALTERN,"

"THE COUNTRY CURATE," &c.

Man is dear to man, the poorest poor
Long for some moments in a weary life
When they can know and feel that they have been
Themselves the fathers, and the dealers out
Of some small blessings; have been kind to such
As needed kindness, for this single cause,
That we have all of us one human heart.

WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

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THE VILLAGE ORACLE.

(CONTINUED.)

THE VILLAGE ORACLE.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CALAMITY.

During the remainder of that day such scenes were witnessed in Waltham as had not come previously under the notice of any of its inhabitants. Everywhere the fields were deserted, while the public-houses swarmed with men whose language became more and more violent in proportion as the liquor took effect; with which, strange to say, the landlords did not scruple to supply them. I state this fact as a curious one, because there was scarce an individual in any of the tap-rooms throughout the place who could boast of having sixpence in his purse; yet all drank their beer copiously, and drank on credit. Meanwhile the farmers met in groups, lamented the turn which affairs had taken, blamed the harshness of the overseer, yet shrunk back from the responsibility of

acting in opposition to him. The overseer, on the contrary, appeared to delight in the storm which he could not deny that he had raised.

"Is it not much better to see the thing out at once," said he, "than to be living in constant hot water? Let them do their worst: they threatened me, not you; let them try to accomplish their threats, and see what will come of it. My double-barrel is ready charged for their benefit, and curse me if the very first that lays his hand on my machine shan't have the contents of it!"

It was to no purpose that his neighbours warned him how hopeless would be the resistance of one man against a hundred: Mr. Amos seemed to have screwed his courage to the sticking-place, and walked away with a deliberate step, avowing his resolution to meet like a man whatever fortune might bring upon him.

With all his courage—and it was great—Mr. Amos judged it prudent that night to take some precautions against surprise. He caused the gates of his yard to be locked as soon as it grew dark; and putting fresh caps on the nipples of his fowling-piece, placed it in the corner of the parlour. A brace of pistols were likewise loaded, and a sword-stick of a very efficient description was laid where it might easily be

got at. All these weapons Mr. Amos designed for his own use; because, in the first place, he kept no male servant as an inmate; and, if the contrary had been the case, he believed that such was not to be trusted. Then, ordering his family to retire early to bed, he extinguished the candles, and sat till long after midnight, wrapped up in a cloak, over the embers of a low fire.

Nothing occurred, however, to alarm him. Once or twice, indeed, the shout of a drunken man, and the tread of persons traversing the road in front of the house, roused him, and he grasped his gun, without a pulse beating the quicker for the movement. But the sounds died away without giving place to others, and his vigilance gradually relaxed. At last he fell asleep in his chair, and woke again only when the stir of his people made him look up, that he might see everything, both within and without, in the very same order in which he had left it over-night.

Meanwhile Mr. Marshall, Dick Solley, and Wall had met, as was agreed upon, at the Anchor. For an hour or so they occupied their accustomed places in the club-room, where, instead of the usual reading of a newspaper, the events of the past day gave full oc-

cupation to mens' thoughts. Nor is it necessary to add that, though cautious of committing himself, Marshall made little secret of the light in which he viewed the proceedings both of the overseer and the magistrate. They had not, however, come to inflame the people, for that was effected already, but for other purposes. Taking advantage, therefore, of the excitement which rendered those around them unobservant of passing events, they withdrew one by one as an opportunity offered.

"Let us go to the 'Good Intent' beer-shop," said Marshall; "it is some way off, and quiet."

Thither they accordingly went, and being provided with a little parlour of their own, they remained there in close and private conclave till long after the short hours of the morning had set in. To what passed during that council no one except themselves could be privy; for their door was bolted, and they conversed in so low a tone, that even the landlady, though she applied her ear to the keyhole, failed to ascertain the subject under discussion. But that the matters discussed were of grave import could not be doubted, inasmuch as they deliberated over tankards rarely replenished, and never once required to be supplied with pipes and tobacco.

When the morning came, and the effects of their potations were worn off, and they beheld their wives out of humour, and heard their children clamouring for bread, the resolution of a large number of the labouring people gave way. One by one they repaired to the overseer's dwelling, and petitioned for the reduced pay which they had recently spurned. But Mr. Amos was not the sort of person to triumph by halves: he now refused to give even the nine shillings, on the ground, that, as they had already rejected it, they had no longer a legal claim; but he offered them eight, which a few consented to accept. The remainder, however, became furious.

"What 's the use of starving any longer?" cried they: "better lie down and die at once, than thus be killed by inches."

Among those who struck their colours Wall was not one. He neither repaired to Mr. Amos's house, nor made a movement in search of work; but took his station in the middle of the street, opposite to the Anchor, where he was soon joined by Dick Solley. The two walking backwards and forwards, conversed earnestly, both their countenances indicating a fierce and determined resolution; while apart from them stood several other small groups, composed en-

tirely of the more resolute of the malcontents who had not consented to the overseer's terms.

"What can be done with chicken-hearted white-livers like these?" said Dick. "There they are off in a body to confess their fault, and beg forgiveness! If you, or I, or any other man made an attempt to serve them, as you recommended, they would take the very first opportunity of saving themselves by giving us up to justice."

"Oh, curse them indeed!" answered Wall; "a poor, pitiful, beggarly, spiritless set of wretches! One could do more with a parcel of women than with cowards like these, who cannot put up with a week's suffering, were a life of comfort to be purchased by it."

"Are you then prepared to give in at once?" asked Dick.

"I," replied Wall—"I give in! No, never! If I can find but three men to back me, I 'll begin the thing alone, and take all the consequences, be they what they may."

"With three men, Wall, you could do nothing. It is only by numbers that we can prevail at all; and therefore, unless we can command people enough to strike terror at the outset, the thing had much better be left alone. Why not follow Marshall's advice?"

"Look you, Dick Solley," answered Wall, "I think there is no man in the parish that has more right to complain than I; yet d—n me if I can bring myself to such a deed as that. No; whatever I do must be done openly and like a man: I am for none of your midnight work; it's not English — it's unworthy of a man."

"Well, well, do as you please; but you may depend upon this——"

"See—what are these fellows about?" interrupted Wall, as ten or twelve men came swinging up the street, talking loudly, and gesticulating with great vehemence. Dick turned in the direction pointed out, and had scarcely done so, when both he and his companion were recognised: the men ran towards them, and in a moment all was explained.

"Would you believe it, Wall? the brute won't give us the nine shillings now. We offered to take his paltry pay and go to work again, and what do you think he did? — he offered us eight!"

"And why did you not accept it?" asked Wall, coolly.

"What! accept eight shillings! Can you ask such a question, Wall? We would see him d—d first!"

"That's strange, too," replied Wall, in the same tone: "there does not seem to me so great a difference between nine shillings and eight, as between twelve shillings and nine. If, after refusing to take less than twelve, you make up your minds to take nine, I think you acted very foolishly to refuse the eight."

"What good would eight shillings do us? Besides, when we agreed to take that, the chances are, he would offer seven, and six, and so on, till he got us ground down to work for nothing. Better rob on the highway, or die at once, than put up with such treatment."

"Now listen, men," exclaimed Wall, raising his hand and speaking with an elevated voice, —"listen to me. If you had stuck to the promises which you freely gave last night, this mortification would have been spared you. Yet I am not sorry that you have suffered it: at least, it may teach you that no terms are to be kept with such as Amos; and that, if you ever hope to obtain redress, you must seek it in a proper manner, and win it with your own hands. Mind, when I say this, I am not an advocate for doing any man a secret injury. Set my enemy in my front, and I will know how to deal with him; but I could not stab him in the dark, and neither will I creep like a

coward under cloud of night to do him wrong. What I say is this: — Are we not more in numbers by far than those that oppress us? Are not our arms stronger? is not our courage as high? What is there to hinder us from showing them that we are both as able and willing to make laws for them as they have been to make laws for us? Will you follow if I lead?"

Wall had been repeatedly interrupted by the shouts of his auditors while delivering this short address, and he was answered at its close by a universal "Yes." It seemed, indeed, as if there needed but a movement on his part to carry the excited men around him against the overseer. But ere any plan of operations could be arranged, or an indication made of his intentions, Mr. Marshall presented himself. He had been appealed to by several of the farmers, who, witnessing the assemblage of people, and dreading some immediate explosion, entreated him to interfere in the restoration of order; and he now ran forward bare-headed, with the view of pouring oil upon the waters.

Wall expressed unmitigated contempt for the soothing and artful harangue with which the passions of the people were assailed; yet so fickle is the multitude, that he spoke in vain.

Marshall was now the favourite. The latter promised that he would use his best endeavours to obtain for them redress. He besought them not to put him in so unfavourable a position as he must occupy after any act of violence had been perpetrated, but to wait patiently at least another day before they adopted rash measures. He too was answered with cheers, and one by one the men began to drop off.

"You have done it now, Marshall," said Wall sternly, when he and Dick and the grocer had been left alone; "you have effectually damaged all my schemes, and must now invent plans of your own. As for me, I and my children may starve; but neither will I work for half wages, nor shall this hand of mine be concerned in a deed of which my heart disapproves."

"Keep yourself quiet, friend," answered Marshall: "your time will come by-and-by. I have done you the best service in hindering you from knocking your head against a wall, as you certainly would have done had you attempted anything to-day. It will be time enough for you to act after all things shall have been prepared."

So saying, the three separated; Wall wending his way sullenly and slowly towards his

comfortless home, Dick betaking himself to the Good Intent, and Marshall returning to receive the thanks of the occupiers, and to prosecute his own business behind the counter.

Nor were the farmers themselves long kept from their accustomed operations by the threatening aspect of affairs in the morning. This was market-day in the neighbouring town, and neither in the corn-exchange, nor at the ordinary which followed, were there any agriculturists more cheerful than those that came from Waltham. Amos was somewhat too harsh, certainly; yet he had done the thing well. The people were completely humbled, and therefore they might afford to treat them a little better by-and-by, in the confident assurance that no undue advantage would be taken of it.

It was dark when Mr. Amos mounted his horse,—for on market-days he still wore a blue coat, one of the last of a stock laid in five years before, and he still rode, though not the sort of animal which five years before he had been accustomed to ride. He had been tempted to commit an excess that day, and was consequently in high spirits, when he, Mr. Rigden, Mr. Sankey, and another, set out at a brisk trot from the inn yard. The church-bell tolled

eight as they cleared the town, and there were yet seven miles before them; so they pushed on, chatting and laughing at the issue of what they were pleased to term the rebellion of the men, which furnished food both for mirth and conversation. They had compassed between four and five miles of their way, when, on ascending an eminence, they beheld the horizon in their front splendidly illuminated to a wide extent. From time to time, moreover, a volume of flame made its appearance above the hedgerows that seemed to intervene, which flickered up for a while, and then diminished, as fire is apt to do when newly kindled. As if actuated by a common influence, the party reined in their horses at once, and held their breaths in terrified suspense.

"Good God! what is that?" exclaimed Mr. Sankey.

"It is a fire somewhere," replied Amos, speaking low, and apparently with clenched teeth; "but where, I cannot tell."

"It's no use stopping here," interrupted Mr. Rigden; "let us push on. It seems to me to be in our parish; and, Amos, by heavens I think it is near your premises!"

Instantly the spurs were struck into the

horses' flanks, and the horses themselves bounded forward. Now the riders being in the bottom of the valley, could perceive only the dark red lights that streamed for a while through heaven; now they began again to mount a height, and the flame and the smoke became visible. They passed a hamlet, every cottage in which had its door open, but not a man, woman, or child seemed to be about the place. They met a man driving a donkey.

"What's that, friend?" shouted they, without pulling up.

"A fire! a fire!" cried the man; "a fire at ——"

The last word was lost in the distance, or the clattering of their horses' hoofs drowned it. And now came a horseman at full speed; his horse panting, and himself riding as if for life and death.

"I am going for the engines," cried he, without waiting to be interrogated. "Don't stop me."

"I know that voice," exclaimed Amos, unexpectedly reining up: "I am sure that was my bailiff.

"I hope not," replied Mr. Rigden, as he and the others pulled up also—"I hope the

fire is not in our parish. I don't think it is. See, it lies away to the north; it is on the other side of the river."

"Then what should my bailiff do riding in this direction for an engine?" demanded Mr. Amos.

"Gentlemen," cried the fourth, who had not spoken a word since the far-off glare had become visible, "we are only wasting time by discussing that point here. Let us get forward, and wherever it may be, let us give all the assistance in our power."

Again they pressed their animals to a gallop, and as each bound of the horses brought them nearer and nearer to the scene of action, their uncertainty respecting the site of the fire increased.

"It is beyond Waltham parish far!" exclaimed one voice.

"No; it is on this side of it," retorted another.

"I am afraid it is in the parish," cried a third.

But their doubts were not now destined to be of long continuance. They approached the village; they gained the bridge, where some women with children were lounging.

"Where is the fire?" shouted the horsemen.

"Oh! just where it ought to be," was the reply—"down at Amos's. Ay, ride, ride—but ye won't put it out!"

They did ride, for Mr. Amos's farm lay a full mile from the street. As they traversed the lane, the brilliancy of the scene became more striking every instant. Now the outlines of the leafless trees that intervened between them and the premises were distinctly visible;—now the dwelling-house, which lay on the near side of the stack-yard, stood forth as at mid-day;—now, behind it, lumps of dark matter, from the sides and faces of which volumes of flame were bursting out, showed themselves in horrid relief against the dark outline of the horizon;—and, last of all, crowds of people were seen moving hither and thither amid the masses, like savages dancing round the fires amid which they sacrifice their human victims. All these sights, with the roar of the ascending flames, rendered terribly audible in the stillness of a calm night, stirred up in the bosoms of those who approached the scene feelings that might not easily be described.

"You were right, gentlemen," said Amos, in the tone of one who is thoroughly subdued; "the odds against me were fearful, and I am beaten."

CHAPTER IX.

A MORAL FEVER.

When they reached the scene of this terrible catastrophe, Mr. Amos and his friends found that a large barn full of grain, six stacks of wheat, one or two of fodder, a whole line of lodges and stables, with an outhouse and a dove-cot besides, were all in flames. How the fire originated nobody could tell, except that it was first discovered in the barn, a slit or loop-hole in the gable of which looked out upon the lane, just within reach of a man's hand whose stature was not diminutive. Neither was the time ascertained with any accuracy. The farm-servants all declared, that when they quitted the stables at eight o'clock everything was safe, and that they had not been gone half an hour when the cry of fire alarmed them. A cottager who lived nearly opposite to the farmhouse had been the first to give the alarm; and the conflagration spread so rapidly,

that long before any steps could be taken to arrest its progress, the possibility of doing so had ceased.

The remarks of the women as they passed the bridge had not been such as to create in Mr. Amos, and those who accompanied him, any anticipation of zeal and alacrity among the crowd. In this, however, their own fears had deceived them: for, whether it was that each man was anxious to clear himself of being suspected as a party concerned, or whether the better feelings of human nature at the moment obtained a mastery over their opposites—or, lastly, whether they were at all affected by the manifest humiliation of the sufferer, who went about among them pale, stupified, and, as it seemed, powerless even of speech; whatever the motive might be that had weight with them, no body of people ever exhibited a better spirit than was displayed by the labouring men that attended the fire. Regardless of personal danger, they applied themselves, some to hinder the fire from extending to the dwelling-house, others to loosen the horses and cattle from their stalls and to turn them out into the orchard. Meanwhile a third party, having provided buckets, laboured to open a way through the flames to the barn-floor, on which a consider-

able quantity of half-dressed grain lay ready for winnowing. As to stopping the destruction with which the stacks were threatened, that, in the absence of a fire-engine, was out of the question; nevertheless, the people put everything in train for working with effect so soon as the means of working should arrive. They collected buckets from every house in the parish; they stationed themselves in double lines between a couple of ponds and the positions in which the engines were intended to be placed; while four or five, by beating with long poles those sides of the burning ricks which adjoined to others not yet ignited, strove to hinder the flames from the one from communicating with the other. And then the universal cessation of human voices was very striking. No one spoke, but, turning their faces towards the fire, all gazed upon it; while the only sound discernible was the rushing of the flames, and the crackling of the corn-stacks from which they ascended.

Such was the mode in which half an hour was spent; Mr. Amos moving all the while amid his blazing property like one that walks in his sleep. If spoken to, he answered—but it was instinctively; neither did he seem capable of issuing a single order, or giving a

single direction. He had passed to the rear-ward of the stack-yard, and was standing in the gloom, when a stealthy step carried some one near him, and a voice spoke in a whisper—"What can your double-barrel do now?" He turned round—saw a light-coloured shooting-jacket—made a grasp at it, but missed; and before he could move from the spot on which he stood, it was gone. "That's the fellow that did it," exclaimed he, restored, as it seemed, immediately to the command of his faculties. "I'll hunt the world over but I'll find him." And he did hunt here, and there, and everywhere. He was now all animation and spirit. He spoke kindly to one man, encouragingly to another; peered into every face, closely examined every coat, but effected no discovery. "This is hard, d——d hard!" he at length said to Marshall, who arrived somewhat tardily at the spot, and wore his usual garb, a brown frock. "I know the scoundrel that did it is about, and I cannot for the life of me detect him."

"Think of saving what you can of the property first, Mr. Amos," replied the grocer; "and, hark! in good time, I hear the engines."

Marshall was right. The lumbering of heavy wheels, driven with great rapidity, caught the

ear. At first distant, it approached nearer and more near every second, till the crack of the whip and the clattering of hoofs were mingled with it; and then all was still. The drivers had turned off into the soft field, and were now guided by those who had been stationed in advance for that purpose to the party. A loud shout hailed the arrival of the machine, which was soon unlimbered and at work. Nor was another long in following: so that in due time the roar of the flames became relieved, if I may so speak, by the rumble of pumps hard at work, and the occasional "hurra, hurra," of those who fed them.

The peasants were zealous, and the firemen skilful; but the exertions of both proved unavailing. It soon, indeed, became apparent, that to extinguish the stacks already ignited, defied their energies. The next thing to be done was to play upon such as had not caught fire; and of these, two were by such means preserved. But the general aspect of the place was pitiable. In the yard, pigs, poultry, calves, dogs, were running about amid heaps of wetted fodder. The apple-trees in the orchard were scorched and shrivelled. The ricks presented each a mass of red-hot ashes, out of which volumes of flame continued to

ascend; while from the air-holes and crevices of the barn sheets of fire were issuing. At last the roof of the building fell in; and after a shower of fiery sparks, its brilliancy began to diminish. It was then that, believing the worst to have taken place, several of his neighbours suggested to Mr. Amos the propriety of distributing to the people the refreshments of which they stood in need. He did not object to the arrangement, and bread and cheese, with a quantity of spirits, being brought from the village, the wet and weary workmen received each a portion. Still, he who ought to have taken the lead in administering to the necessities of his neighbours kept aloof: he was again chap-fallen and melancholy; and his viands were consumed in consequence, without the most remote approximation to gratitude among those who devoured them.

So passed the night; for few of those whom curiosity or a better principle had drawn to the scene of conflagration quitted it before dawn. Neither were they entirely dispersed throughout the whole of the following day, inasmuch as the ashes still smouldering, it was justly apprehended that they might, by the springing up of a breeze, be fanned again into flame. But very little benefit accrued to

Mr. Amos from their exertions. Property to the amount of several thousand pounds had perished; and as, among other strange freaks, he had always argued in favour of the policy of each man being an insurer to himself, there was no public body to which he could look for making good even a portion of it. No wonder that he should have been dejected: for some time he had found it a hard matter to make, as he expressed himself, the two ends of the year meet; because there still hung over him liabilities which he had incurred in the prosperous times; and in the education of his family, though born under circumstances of great discredit, he never grudged expense. When, therefore, he beheld the entire produce of his farm, including a large portion of the last tithe crop which he was destined to gather in, consumed before his eyes, even his dogged firmness gave way: he withdrew into an inner chamber, and wept like a child.

It was not, however, upon Mr. Amos alone that the fire seemed to have produced a powerful effect: into all ranks and orders of persons a kind of panic was infused, which they found it as difficult to account for as to shake off. The labouring people anticipated, and not without justice, that a course of inquiries,

harassing to many of them, would be instituted into the origin of the calamity; while the farmers admitted one to another that no man was safe. The country gentlemen likewise took the alarm; there were meetings of magistrates held; there were rewards offered for the apprehension of the incendiary. First one, and then another suspected person was taken up; officers came down from Bow-street; and if there was a lack of success in the measures adopted, at all events there was no deficiency of zeal in carrying them forward. But every investigation terminated in disappointment; against no individual could grounds even of strong suspicion be discovered, till at last inquiry ceased altogether. Yet the spirit in which the fire was believed to have originated did not cease: on the contrary, it spread over different parts of the country like a contagious disease, till, within one short week, not a night passed over without the light of fires being seen, either near or far off, towards every point of the compass.

While the neighbouring parishes were thus subject to daily and nightly alarms — alarms which were the more harassing that they appeared to defy all measures of precaution and prevention,—in Waltham the same sulky and

dissatisfied spirit prevailed that had operated both among employers and employed since the last meeting of the committee. The labouring people neither sought employment nor petitioned for the wages that were due; while the overseer, either hardened by the misfortune to which he had recently been subjected, or too busy to attend to their wants, gave himself no trouble to look after them. It was remarked, moreover, that Mr. Amos made no movement to recompense the people who had worked at his fire, nor yet to repay the publicans for the refreshments that had been supplied. Still, those who thought at all could not but acknowledge that, for a man labouring under the calamity which had overtaken Mr. Amos, every allowance ought to be made. As if fate itself, however, had determined that the tempers of the peasantry should be tried to the uttermost, there occurred, on the Saturday night following, a large fire in the neighbouring parish, whither a considerable proportion of the men of Waltham repaired, and where all were said not to have behaved with perfect propriety. Nevertheless, some did their duty well; and as the whole affair was over by five o'clock on the Sunday morning, the curate naturally expected that, when the hour of

divine service returned, he would find his accustomed congregation in their places, and all not less attentive than they were wont to be to the ordinances of the church.

The curate was entirely deceived in this expectation. In the country parishes of Kent it is not much the custom, under any circumstances, to gather together a full congregation in the forenoon. Men who have devoted a whole week to labour, rising up early, if they do not go to bed late, are too apt to imagine that the former portion of the Lord's day may be spent in personal indulgence; and hence very few quit their beds in sufficient time to be present at morning prayer. In like manner the women, taking perhaps undue care of the body, spend the Sunday morning in making ready their dinner against noon. The church is thus but slenderly attended, not even the inducement of a sermon drawing many persons together. Though, therefore, the curate was a little struck with the more than common paucity of attendance, he read the liturgy that forenoon without much misgiving; but when, on passing from the church to the school after service, he beheld the labouring people gathered in groups about the street, their heads held closely together, and an expression of anxiety

and excitement in their countenances, an indescribable apprehension, he knew not of what, came over him. He stopped and addressed one small band, in the centre of which stood Wall.

"I suppose you were at the fire last night, Wall?" said he. "Indeed, I heard that a great many men from this parish were there, and that they did their duty. Yet I think you would have been as well employed at church, as wasting your morning in idle chat in the street."

"I was not at the fire, sir," replied Wall, with his customary mixture of civility and independence. "I never gave my voice for so unmanly a method of righting the poor man's wrongs; but I never will lend my aid to extinguish fires which the oppressed have lighted."

"It strikes me, Wall," said the curate, "that if you were to soften your manner a little, you would not suffer by it. There is no use in setting yourself in array against your superiors. I know you to be an honest and a hard-working man; but others, who have seen less of you, will be apt to imagine that you are willing to dare anything."

"And they won't be far wrong, sir—that you

may depend upon," answered Wall. "However, we have no fault to find with you; I wish to God all the gentlemen were like you;—but these are bad times, sir, both for rich and poor, as will be seen by-and-by."

The curate passed on, for he did not care to involve himself in a discussion with a man of Wall's habits; but had not gone far ere he arrived at another group, in the centre of which stood Dick Solley.

"Your father would not have absented himself from prayers this morning, Richard," said he, stopping; "and I am at a loss to conceive any good reason why his son should have done so."

"Nor can I give you one, sir," answered Dick, touching his hat respectfully; "unless it be that business of a very peculiar nature kept him away. I was at the fire all night, and have not yet had time to shift myself."

"Perhaps so, Richard; but in that case I am afraid you did not go straight home from the scene of your commendable exertions."

Dick blushed, and the curate, unwilling to press him too hard, proceeded on his way. He listened to the children as they read and said their catechisms, but scarcely gave his

attention to the subject; and when he returned to the church, I cannot say that he was surprised to find it unusually thin. Now such an occurrence is rare in the country parishes of Kent. Generally speaking, few dissenters prevail there; and whatever may be the case in the forenoon, the service of the afternoon is almost always well attended. Mr. Jacobson, therefore, guessed that all was not right with his people, seeing that so few came to take their parts in the performance of public worship. Besides, when the service was ended, he was not slow in ascertaining that the assembling themselves together, of which he had taken notice in the earlier part of the day, had not ceased even during church-time; and when, over and above all this, it came to his knowledge that the tap-rooms were filled, and the publicans busy till a late hour in the night, his heart altogether misgave him.

"God knows what the result may be," said he to his wife, as they sat together after family worship, preparatory to retiring to rest. "I have long seen that a bad spirit was abroad among the people, and Will Watts has confirmed these suspicions by the reports he has brought me. That fire at Amos's was a shocking

thing, of which I wish that I had positive proof that none of my own parishioners have been the authors. But to-day their conduct is altogether incomprehensible: they have not only kept away from church, but they avoid me as if I were their enemy. I am very much deceived if we shan't hear of this ere long: and Wall, industrious as he is, seems to be at the bottom of it. What a pity that man's spirit should be so proud! Then there is Dick Solley. A sad blot upon the scutcheon of his race that young man's career has been; and yet I would not like to stake my credit on his not disgracing it even more. However, the future is in the hands of Him who has regulated the past; and if these misguided men do anything that is wrong, they, not we, will suffer. I wish they would learn to submit themselves to the necessities of their situation."

"Yes, my dear," replied his wife; "and I wish also they had a better overseer than Mr. Amos."

"Very likely," answered the curate; "perhaps I wish so too: but it is not exactly the time to discuss the qualities of the captain when his crew are in a state of mutiny. However, as you and I can't mend matters, we had best

go to bed, and leave them to the only Power that can. We had best go to bed."

The worthy couple retired accordingly; and their slumbers were as light as the sleep of those who have no qualms of conscience to disturb them generally is.

CHAPTER X.

A STORM.

Mr. Jacobson was at breakfast next morning, when Giles Solley, who then filled the office of churchwarden, suddenly entered the room.

"The whole parish is in an uproar, sir," exclaimed he. "A body of men armed with picks, scythes, clubs, and all sorts of weapons, have just marched through the street, and I understand it is their intention to break every threshing-machine in the neighbourhood."

Mr. Jacobson sprang from his chair in a moment. He was well advanced in years, and, generally speaking, quiet and retiring; but oature had given him a resolute spirit, and he felt that the present was a time in which it ought to have room for working. "Go instantly, my good lad," said he, "and gather together as many of your neighbours as you can. I am no magistrate, but the present is an emergency in which I am willing to take all

responsibility on myself. We must put down such a movement as this in the outset, otherwise it is impossible to tell where the thing will end."

Giles ran off without delay to do as the curate recommended; while Mr. Jacobson himself, having caused his horse to be saddled, set out with all haste in quest of the rioters. He found no difficulty in tracing them to a certain extent.

As yet, indeed, they had not committed any act of outrage on property, for their sole object seemed to be to enlarge their numbers as much as possible; but their progress was sufficiently marked by the species of tyranny which they exercised over the men in their own station wherever they ascertained that they were at work. Like a wave of the sea, which gathers volume as it rolls towards the shore, the crowd passed from farm to farm, increasing as it went. As soon as the rioters reached a collection of outbuildings, they halted; then three or four, carrying heavy bludgeons, went forward, and every man and boy whom they found in the stables, in the barn, or about the yard, they compelled to abandon their occupations and fall in with the column. This exploit drew forth repeated cheers, which, in not a few instances, alarmed the families of

the tenantry so much, that beer was handed out, with other refreshments, of which the insurgents freely partook; and then forming their ranks with great care, throwing out an advanced guard, and leaving a covering party to bring up the rear, they marched on, till their numbers, which at the outset scarcely came up to eighteen, had swelled to little short of a hundred and fifty.

Such was the information which was communicated to Mr. Jacobson at several of the houses which he visited in the course of his ride. Still, nobody could or would tell the exact route which they had taken, and fearing lest they might countermarch upon the village in his absence, he retraced his steps thither. He found on his arrival Giles Solley, willing and ready to undertake any service: four or five of the tenants besides were assembled—and an attempt was made—a vain one certainly—to delay the progress of one or two more, who were hurrying off, as they said, on urgent business to the nearest town. It was to no purpose that Mr. Jacobson appealed to the manhood of the parties thus circumstanced—they could not possibly delay; and as to the rest, they believed, or pretended to believe, that they were too few in number to accomplish anything

effectually, though just about sufficient to provoke to madness the fury of the insurgents.

"Well, gentlemen," exclaimed Mr. Jacobson at last, "I must say that I had formed a better opinion of the Kentish yeomen: but since it must be so, I will see what one man, and he not young, can do against them."

"You shall not go alone, sir," cried Giles, springing into the saddle; "I will share your fate with you, be it good or evil; and our friends here may in the mean while send or go for Colonel Hamilton, or any other magistrate they can find."

Mr. Jacobson had already put his horse in motion, having ascertained from a little girl, that if he rode in a particular direction he would be sure to meet the mob, which was marching round the outskirts of the parish. When Giles overtook him, therefore, he would have fain persuaded him to go back; but finding that he was resolute to incur the same risks with himself, he did not reject his aid.

"We can do nothing by violence, Giles," said he: "firmness we may and we must display; but it is not our tactics to come to blows, or even to angry words. Mind, I must be the commanding officer here: if there was room for fighting, depend upon it you should have

the foremost place; but our weapons must be reason, and an appeal to the men's better feelings."

"I am quite ready to act as you desire, sir," replied Giles; "only I do think, that if these people, whether with or without reason, be permitted to throw the whole neighbourhood into alarm in the open day, there is an end to all order and to the authority of the law for ever."

"That may be, Giles," said the curate; "but where there is such an evident want of courage among the persons who ought to enforce their own authority, it would be idle in you and me to wage war with a multitude. If, indeed, argument does not prevail, then we may try something else; but I hope that it may prevail."

They had by this time gained the bottom of the lane, just where it struck off in two branches to the right and left, when, looking down the latter, they beheld, about a couple of hundred yards off, the formidable array of insurgents advancing towards them. For the movement of a purely irregular crowd, nothing could be more imposing. First came two men, each armed with a huge bludgeon. About twenty paces in rear of these were eight more carrying pickaxes and sledge-hammers. Another interval

of twenty or thirty yards intervened, which was closed up by the main body, amounting in all to somewhere about a hundred; very many of whom, however, carried no weapons, while the remainder brandished hop-poles, with here and there a bill-hook and a hammer. Last of all came a rear-guard of six or eight men, at the same distance from the main body as that by which it was separated from the advanced guard: all of these bore spades, or axes, with a couple of pruning-knives, of which the appearance was exceedingly formidable.

"I think, Giles," observed Mr. Jacobson, "that you had much better halt where you are. Possibly your brother may be in that crowd; and if so, you would not like to be placed in the disagreeable situation either of bearing witness against him, or of acting partially in such a case: and were it not so, I am sure that I can do more alone than even with you at my side. If I want your help, depend upon it I will make a signal."

Giles consented on these conditions to pull up, while Mr. Jacobson rode forward: his coming was evidently not agreeable to the two men in front.

"What!" exclaimed he, "you, Wall—you and Richard Solley? I can scarcely believe my

eyes! You are the last men in the place—and especially you, Wall — whom I should have expected to see in such a situation."

"That may be, sir," replied Wall, civilly yet doggedly, and without making any movement to halt; "but I am here, and here I mean to be, till some redress is got for me and the rest of these poor men, who have been too long trodden under foot. I pray you to move your horse on one side, or else some of them may back him a little too rudely."

"I am not afraid of that, friend," replied the curate; "neither do I mean to get out of the way. I came on purpose to meet you, to place myself in the midst of you, and to ask what you mean by thus setting the laws of your country at defiance, and creating alarm among all peaceable people. Fie, men, fie!—this might happen elsewhere, but in Waltham I certainly never did expect to witness a scene so discreditable."

"What makes it discreditable?" demanded Wall, fiercely: "is it discreditable to seek the means of supporting our families by honest industry?"

"Surely not," replied Mr. Jacobson, round whom the crowd had by this time assembled; "every exertion of honest industry is to be

commended. But what does all this mean? what is it that you intend?"

"To smash those cursed threshing-machines, to be sure!" exclaimed several voices at once.

"They talk of want of employ," continued Wall; "why then, if there is not work enough for men, use wood and iron to do it?"

"This is not the time for arguing such points," replied the curate, "nor did I meet you to do so; I came here hoping that, for your own sakes—ay, for my sake—you would be persuaded to disperse, and go quietly each man to his own house. But, since you put the question to me, I tell you that you have no more right to destroy a man's threshing-machine than he would have to destroy your spades and axes, and then refuse to pay you because you could not cultivate the soil without them. Besides, have you forgotten what the chairman said at the last quarter-sessions, when the men were tried for the very offence which you threaten?"

"Whoo! whoo!" roared out many voices from the throng; "never mind what he said —what did he do? gave them three days' imprisonment; and we are all ready to take that, provided we get rid of threshing-machines."

" But you forget, my good fellows, that this merciful sentence of the magistrates was severely blamed by the King's government. For God's sake, mind what you are about! I tell you, that the first man among you that lays his hand on a machine will be marked, and as sure as he is marked he will be transported. You shall not go forward another step on this errand; I myself will withstand you. I never wish to do anything to my own people except in kindness; but you may rely upon it that I will not look quietly on and see even you break the laws."

" Now, sir," said a man whose countenance was strange to Mr. Jacobson, and who was evidently not one of the body which he helped to put in motion, " don't you think that it is not quite safe for you to hold such language to us? We are not in church now, neither are we in a humour to listen to a sermon. My advice to you is, to go home, and let us take our own way, and we won't interfere with yours."

Mr. Jacobson instantly spurred his horse through the throng, and seizing the speaker by the collar, dragged him towards him, while he said, " I am not afraid to go among my own people at any season or under any circumstances; and I am as little afraid to make a

prisoner of one who has no business where he is except a bad one: you, at all events, shall go with me."

The man struggled, but the curate held his grasp, till the former, throwing himself upon the ground, compelled Mr. Jacobson to let go, in order to keep his horse from trampling upon him. But the stranger was no sooner risen again than he drove his horse towards him a second time. The crowd, however, interposed, and in a tone rather of entreaty than of menace besought him that he would not push the matter further. Dick Solley, in particular, was the spokesman on this occasion; of which Mr. Jacobson took advantage, by working upon his better feelings, and striving to enlist him on the side of order: nor did he entirely fail. "Unstable as water," Dick could not withstand the appeals which the man whom he had in early youth been taught to respect made to him.

"There is not a man among us that would not follow you, sir, through the world," cried he. "But what can we do with the farmers? They won't employ us; and when they do, they pay us at a rate that scarce keeps soul and body together. Why should a single man that does as much, or maybe more, than a married

man, get only half the wages that are paid to his neighbour?—and why should they take off the men's pay, at this season too, when coals and candles are most wanted? Only promise to get these grievances redressed, and we will go wherever you choose to lead, and do whatever you choose to order."

"I have no authority, Richard, to make any bargain with you," replied Mr. Jacobson: "and even if I had, this is not the time when I should exercise it. You must first of all disperse and return to your work, and then I shall be ready to mediate between you and your employers. But observe, that I pledge myself to nothing. Whatever is fair from man to man, I will try to bring about between you; but I give no promises, nor will I even seem to bargain with you while you are thus arrayed. Once more I ask, are you willing to follow me to the street, and to disperse when you arrive there?—or must I send off for a magistrate and a troop of horse to disperse you?"

"Let's go with Mr. Jacobson," cried a dozen of voices together. "Let us leave our case to him: he will see us righted."

"Once more, my lads," said the curate aloud: "don't mistake me. I engage for nothing. I come here only to save you if I

can from the certain consequences of this outrage."

"We'll leave it to you, sir! we'll leave it to you!" shouted the crowd: "you will do what you can for us, we know. Lead on—we will follow you."

Mr. Jacobson did lead, happy in the idea that he was saving a portion of his flock from much misery, though not entirely acquitting in his own mind their employers; and for a while they followed him as sheep follow their shepherd. But when they had compassed about half the distance between their place of meeting and the village, Marshall the grocer met them. He affected great surprise and regret at the disorderly appearance which they presented, and complimented Mr. Jacobson on the success of his efforts; after which he gradually fell to the rear, Wall and half a dozen more attending him; the rest went on with the curate in their front. It chanced, however, that across a narrow field lay a farmhouse, where a machine was known to be in use, and the temptation to break it seemed greater than many of them could withstand. The rear of the throng, indeed, burst through a gap in the hedge, and ran towards the obnoxious dwelling with loud shouts. In a moment Mr. Jacobson leaped his

horse over a stile, and galloped towards the same point. He reached it first, and beheld to his mortification and annoyance the machine brought out into the field by the direction of its owner, as if to put every facility in the way of the rioters to break it. But Mr. Jacobson had assumed his part, and he was determined at all hazards to go through with it. He dismounted, and taking his station in front of the machine, challenged any man in the crowd to lay a violent hand upon it. One man advanced, brandishing a hammer.

"Strike!" said the curate,—"strike, at your peril."

The man raised his weapon, looked fiercely into the curate's countenance, saw that his eye did not twinkle nor his cheek blanch, and dropped his hand without inflicting a blow. A parley followed, in which Mr. Jacobson's firmness prevailed, and the mob once more desisted from their purpose. Indeed, it seemed as if they were now completely vanquished; for even those who had hitherto yielded, rather from the influence of example than on account of any impression made upon themselves, manifested symptoms of perfect willingness to obey the wishes of their new leader. "Mr. Jacobson for ever!—we will go with Mr. Jacobson!"

burst from every one present; and they did go quietly, some leading his horse, others holding by the stirrup-leather, and many more stating their grounds of complaint with an earnest entreaty that he would do his best to get them removed. But the curate would not permit them to march in a body through the village. Halting them, therefore, about a couple of hundred yards from the entrance of it, he delivered to them a short lecture on the great impropriety of their conduct, and on the narrow escape which they had made from its consequences, and wound up by requiring that they would go off by twos and threes in different directions towards their respective homes. Never were schoolboys more obedient; they broke up into small groups, and he, having waited in the middle of the road till he saw the last section depart, rode leisurely to the vicarage, and gave his horse to the groom.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RESULTS OF A STORM.

"Now, are not you a nice set of fellows, to be blown about hither and thither by the breath of a parson!" said Marshall to a body of six or seven of the most daring of the men, among whom Wall and Dick Solley were included. "I think I never saw anything to equal this. You would not do anything underhand!—you would show them that you felt like men, and that you could act like men! How very close is the picture to the reality!—Bah! I am ashamed of you quite."

"You can't be more ashamed than I am," answered Wall. "I did not think—I could not have believed — that a hundred and fifty Englishmen would have been turned aside from their purpose by one parson. What right have we to complain any more after this? For my part, if they offer us two shillings a week, instead of two shillings a day, I hold

that we are bound to work hard for it, and to take it and be thankful."

"We certainly do look very much like a set of d—d fools," observed Dick Solley; "and I own that none of you can look more foolish than myself. Curse that smooth tongue of his! I did not know how to resist it."

"And it would have been precisely the same, Dick," said Marshall, "if any other smooth tongue had tackled you. Oh, it is heart-breaking to have such tools to work with! What an opportunity has been lost of striking terror into the bull-frogs far and near, and making your own terms with them! You may wait a lifetime without finding such another."

"I deny that it is lost even now," exclaimed Wall, striking the ground with his bludgeon. "See, there they are, the most of them, collecting again about the place. If we had but the means of treating them to a little drink, and keeping them at it till towards evening, I am confident that we might do what we liked with them yet."

"You shall not want for that, Wall," replied Marshall, handing him three sovereigns; "though observe that I give you this merely to refresh the poor fellows after their hard morning's work. My advice is, that after you have

eaten and drunk enough, you break up and go quietly home. No doubt it would have been as well had this row never taken place, for you have only rendered your condition worse, by barking where you could not bite. But better put up with evils that you know, than run the risk of others of which the amount may be greater. Go and give the men an allowance; and then to your homes, every one of you."

"To be sure we will," exclaimed Wall and Dick Solley, hurrying off towards the nearest of the groups, with which they held a short conference. Immediately one from that body hastened to a second, which again communicated to a third, and so on, till in due time about sixty persons were again brought together. Then they betook themselves to the Anchor and the Lion, of which the tap-rooms were very soon crowded; nor for an hour and a half was any sound discernible among them except loud and general conversation. But as the daylight began to wax dim, and the liquor to act, topics more immediately bearing upon their existing condition were introduced. It is not necessary to specify to what these in their turn led, nor yet to adduce the arguments which carried conviction to every mind. Enough is done, when I state that, grasping once more the

weapons which but a short while previously they had laid aside, the multitude rushed with a wild outcry into the street. Neither was a moment allowed them for reflection. They were hurried forward without a check to the farmhouse outside the yard of which they had lately seen a threshing-machine deposited. They sprang upon it like wild beasts on their prey; and in five minutes only the fragments of it remained. This done, they marched, yelling aloud, to another and another, committing at each the same outrage. In a word, long before Mr. Jacobson knew that a second outburst had taken place, such an impetus was given to the insane fury of the rioters, that no moral influence could be expected to soften, far less to control it.

When the alarm spread to the village, and the curate, with four or five of the tenantry, came together, it was felt and admitted, even by the former, that interference on their parts would now accomplish nothing. An express was, however, sent off for the nearest magistrate, — unfortunately not Colonel Hamilton, for he happened to be from home—but another gentleman, personally brave enough, as all English gentlemen are, but exceedingly fearful of incurring responsibility. He would not come

to the scene of danger, but sent back a message, that the presence of a magistrate in such cases was not necessary, inasmuch as every one of the King's subjects had a perfect right to interfere for the preservation of the King's peace. Now there was nobody at Waltham who doubted this,—the very sexton knew the fact; but the sexton knew also, that the presence of one having authority carries with it encouragement to the well-disposed, in the very same degree in which it excites alarm and misgivings among the disorderly. The peaceable people of Waltham accordingly contented themselves with murmuring against what they pronounced the shameful indifference of the squire, and then betook themselves each to his own home. Neither did they go abroad again when, about nine o'clock at night, the village rang with the shouts of a triumphant mob, glorying in the destruction of every threshing-machine within a circle of two or three miles around the place. On the contrary, the women and children shuddered, while the men looked about for weapons of defence, not knowing how soon they might be attacked in their very dwellings. But for such apprehensions there was no ground: the rioters had fully accomplished their designs, and, after giving three cheers,

filed off by ones and twos to their respective dwellings.

"We shall not be disturbed any more to-night, my dear," said Mr. Jacobson to his wife, as the clock struck twelve. "The village is as quiet as a city of the dead: I think you may safely go to bed."

Scarcely were the words uttered, when a heavy trampling of horses' hoofs sounded outside the vicarage. Those within listened, when immediately the gate bell was rung with violence, and the curate started up.

"Don't go, my love!" exclaimed his wife—"depend upon it the people have broken out again. Pray, pray, don't trust yourself outside the gate!"

"I must go, my dear," replied Mr. Jacobson; "whatever the cause of this alarm may be, I must see what is wanted. Besides, I heard horses, and the mob were not mounted, you know."

Mr. Jacobson went out, opened his gate, and gave admission, not to any gang of rioters, but to the high sheriff of the county, who, followed by a numerous band of gentlemen and their servants mounted, and escorted by a troop of dragoons, was come to make prisoners of the ringleaders in the late disturbances. The pre-

sence of the curate being required as a duty, Mr. Jacobson would not shrink from affordingit. He had seen no machine actually broken, though he was able to identify the persons of those who took an active part in the disturbances of the morning; and as these were greatly suspected of having promoted, if they did not positively occasion, the outrages that followed, to arrest them was considered a point of the first importance. Then began a scene of which it would be difficult by any power of language to convey an accurate representation. The slumbers of the people of Waltham were broken by the tramp of steeds, and the voices of men speaking eagerly and in anger. Steel scabbards jingled, when there was no possible occasion for them; parties rode hither and thither through the fields, to drag from their beds misguided men, now dreaming of their own prowess and their own triumph; while here and there one culprit more vigilant than the rest, leaping from his window, fled across the country, and escaped the arm of the law. Undoubtedly, if it was the sheriff's wish to strike terror into the whole neighbourhood, he succeeded: for the blow fell with the rapidity of thought; and the rioters were torn from their families, and far advanced under military escort towards the

county gaol, ere they had fully awakened to a consciousness of their perilous condition.

When the day that succeeded this disastrous night came in, the aspect of affairs in and around Waltham exhibited a striking contrast to that which had prevailed previous to the disturbance. Women and children moved hither and thither, mourning over the arrest of those most dear to them, and execrating the counsels which had brought about such a result, and of which but twelve hours ago they had been the strenuous advocates. Such of the rioters as had been overlooked or spared, either hastened to pursue their wonted labours in the fields, where they slunk aside as often as they saw or imagined that they had become subjects of observation to those who employed them. Nor was the effect produced upon the farmers less remarkable. Evidently less happy at the vindication of the law, than thunderstruck at the occurrence of events of which they had never contemplated the possibility, they manifested no disposition whatever to triumph over the humbled labourers. It seemed, on the contrary, that feelings not very dissimilar to those which once united the master to his servant had been revived among them; for they spoke kindly to their people, and voluntarily undertook to deal

with them, provided they proved themselves deserving, in a spirit of the utmost liberality. Moreover, Marshall, who up to yesterday had been regarded as an oracle, was now loaded with maledictions.

"This is the triumph you promised my husband!" cried the wife of Wall, who was of course among the prisoners. "Would to God he had never listened to you! What am I to do with my babes now? how am I to keep them?"

"It was a black day that ever brought you here," exclaimed another woman, whose husband had been torn from her side over-night. "We might suffer a little, and we did suffer; but what was that to be compared with the scrape into which your advice has brought us? Oh! my poor Jem, I will never see him more."

Marshall was by far too skilful to think of opposing either argument or remonstrance to the first overflowings of a woman's indignation; he therefore bore the reproaches that were heaped upon him with great stoicism; nor was it till an interval of some days had elapsed that he ventured to speak to the mourners in the language of encouragement. When he did speak, however, he was listened to attentively,

—nay, he soon made it appear that everything had been done contrary to his recommendation, while at the same time he undertook to have the defence of the rioters so managed that not one among them should be obliged to leave the country. He was credited in this also by the infatuated people to whom he addressed himself, though the result showed that he had promised more than he possessed ability to perform.

My tale is well-nigh told: for the fate of the younger of the two brothers on which it principally turns, a few sentences will suffice to describe. Arrested on the night of the riots and committed to gaol, Dick Solley never anticipated a return to Waltham. He had been foremost in the attacks on more than one machine; and though, during the heat of the fray, consequences were either forgotten or disregarded, a few hours spent in the press-yard, as a prisoner, re-awakened him to reflection. With reflection, moreover, came remorse, so bitter and so deep-seated, that those who believed themselves to be beset with the same dangers that surrounded him, accused him of faint-heartedness in looking upon them so gloomily.

"Why, Dick," observed his friend Wall,

"I expected better things from you. What though they do transport you?—you will leave no wife and children behind as I shall; and in the new country to which you must be sent, who knows what good may befall you? Cheer up, man! you make me blush for your manhood, and you damp the spirits of those whom you helped to bring into the scrape, and whom it is therefore your duty to encourage."

"I don't think of that, Wall. No, no! there are other matters to trouble me much more important;—my poor mother!"

"I am sorry for your mother, certainly," replied Wall; "but there is no help for her. Besides, if it was your fortune to be transported, you could not avoid it; and she may find consolation in the thought, that you are sent out of the country for no offence against God's laws, however you may have broken man's. Had we followed that scoundrel's advice, the case would have been different. If you had been concerned in Amos's fire, then indeed she might have looked on you as disgracing her for ever."

"Ay, Wall, if I had—and what if I had?"

"I don't believe it—I won't believe it," cried Wall. "At all events, I beg of you not to drop

such a hint again, either to me or to anybody else. You can't tell what men may be tempted to do for the sake of getting themselves out of trouble."

Wall walked away from his companion as he spoke; but soon afterwards returned, to impress upon him more and more earnestly the necessity for mental exertion; and he so far succeeded, that Dick cleared his brow to a certain extent, and seemed to wait his approaching trial with the same dogged indifference that characterized the deportments of the rest.

At last the day of trial came; concerning which it is unnecessary to say more, than that eight of the principal rioters, including both Wall and Dick Solley, appeared in the dock. The evidence against them all was without a flaw; neither could the ingenuity of the counsel, who had been hired to conduct the defendants' case, shake it. Then came an appeal to character, which so far prevailed, that those of whom competent authorities spoke well had their sentences commuted from transportation, the pronounced penalty, to different periods of imprisonment with hard labour. Among the individuals thus leniently dealt with, neither Wall nor Dick Solley were included. The former, indeed, had rendered

himself so conspicuous, that to permit any consideration of the state of his large family to weigh against the demands of justice, would have been fatal in its consequences; and harrowing and heart-breaking was the scene that took place, when his wife, with seven children, one of them an infant at the breast, came to take leave of him, probably for ever. Yet, distressing as it was, it had about it scarcely more of interest, with much less of mystery, than the parting interview between Dick and his brother Giles. The latter no sooner heard the result of the trial, than he applied for, and obtained, permission to visit his brother in the gaol. By the kindness of the gaoler, moreover, an opportunity which Dick eagerly sought of opening his mind to him in secret was afforded; and the relatives were, in consequence, closeted together the whole of the night. No one knew what had passed between them during that long interview. From time to time, indeed, the watchman in going his rounds heard their voices in loud discussion, with an occasional exclamation, through the thick door; but no articulate sound reached him; and even these bursts of passion never seemed to endure. The result of the whole was, however, this:—When the coach arrived which was

to convey the convicts to the hulks, at the prison-door,—and, with equal mercy and promptitude, it came on the very morning after the sentences had been passed,—Giles Solley led his brother forth, and handed him, manacled as he was, to his seat at the back of the vehicle. He then pressed his hand, repeated twice the word "remember," and turned away without shedding a tear. Neither was he observed to allude to him at all after his return to Waltham, except once. It chanced that, on the Sunday, Mr. Jacobson, after preaching a sermon on the occasion, walked down to Crackstakes, in order to condole with Giles and his mother.

"I am much obliged to you, sir," observed Giles in reply, "for your kind expressions of regret; but I will be still more obliged if you never mention his name again. Richard is a fortunate man to be where he is—I trust he will make use of his good fortune as he ought."

THE OVERSEER.

THE OVERSEER.

CHAPTER I.

PROPOSALS.

The rapidity with which, in a country place, where order is the rule, and confusion the exception, people revert after an outbreak to their accustomed habits, would astonish the more mercurial and perhaps reflecting inhabitants of a great town. In Waltham, for example, no outward trace of the convulsion to which it had recently been subjected could, after a week had elapsed, be discovered. The labourers were all returned to their usual occupations; a meeting of the tenantry had likewise been held, at which it was agreed to portion out the men among the occupiers according to the extent of each man's occupation; while, instead of drawing a line between the pay of the married and the single men, the former were, under certain restric-

tions, to be kept on throughout six, the latter for three days, in each week at full wages. By these means it was hoped to smooth down whatever acerbity might prevail on either side, without giving a triumph to the paupers: and, imperfect as the device was, it certainly had the desired effect so long as it was adhered to.

In spite, however, of this outward show of renewed good-humour, no man interested in the welfare of the place could conceal from himself that the different orders of society were now divided by a gulf, such as had never divided them before. The utmost suspicion, indeed, prevailed everywhere. The principal parishioners, trusting none of their people, concerted a system of rural police, by which they became bound to protect one another's property from violence; and night after night saw men armed at all points, and abroad, patrolling the parish, as if some foreign enemy were on the coast, or a civil war raging in the neighbourhood! The immediate effect of this system unquestionably was to put a stop to the fires. Here and there an act of incendiarism was committed—for incendiarism had become a disease, which no precautionary measures could remove all at once; but, generally speak-

ing, one species of property was preserved at the expense of a heavy outlay of another. For an English farmer is not the sort of person to turn out night after night, especially in the winter. While the memory of danger is fresh, he will submit patiently enough to hardships; and with the prospect of personal loss before him in case he hold back, he will bestir himself for a season. But his endurance soon wears out; and, in the genuine spirit of a people enervated by long indulgence, he fancies that his purse will accomplish that which his body is too indolent to attempt. Whenever it comes to this, and the poor are hired to do what their betters refuse to do for themselves, there is an end to all kind of good faith between them:—you make it, in fact, the interest of the poor to excite alarm from time to time, in order that the system of stipendiary protection may be continued; while many a lawless act is perpetrated or connived at by the very persons to whom you look as the guardians of your rights and property.

Among the occupiers of Waltham, there was no one on whom recent events produced so powerful an effect as Mr. Amos. It is true that of his losses he affected to speak with indifference; and being a man of great reso-

lution, he bore himself in all companies as if nothing of the kind had befallen. Yet was the impression made upon him such as he found it impossible to disguise from any attentive spectator. He was no longer the bully that he used to be. His language to the poor was civil, bordering upon submissive; and he ceased to advocate in his management of parish matters an economy which might be described as needlessly rigid. Moreover, the independent tone, bordering upon defiance, with which he was accustomed to salute and converse with his neighbours, became very much softened. He even talked once or twice of coming to church; and when the curate, taking advantage of his situation, endeavoured to draw him into a more careful review of his condition as a responsible being, it was said that he shed tears. Still, Amos was a proud man; and pride, after being indulged for more than forty years, becomes a portion of man's nature. Besides, he was peculiarly jealous of his solvency; and when forced to admit, on the return of settling day, that it was impossible for him to pay his bills with the promptitude that formerly characterised him, he did so with a bitterness that went far to convince his creditors that he was

little better than a ruined man. Nevertheless, they abstained from pressing him, being fully convinced that as soon as ever he could pay, he would; while he, like a man to whom it is entirely new to receive obligations, knew no medium in his manner between haughtiness and absolute servility.

It was something more than a fortnight after the transportation of the convicts, as Mr. Amos was returning late one night from his patrol duty, that he was met by Marshall, about half-way between the village and his own house. Since the commencement of the disturbances no communication had taken place between them; for the liberality of the latter had gone so much farther than even the Blue tenantry relished, that they withdrew from him their countenance, which at one period they had esteemed it judicious to give. By Mr. Amos, therefore, this rencontre was so little relished, that he would have passed on, after coldly returning the grocer's salute, had not Marshall stopped and exhibited other manifest symptoms of a desire to enter into conversation with him. Amos stopped also, and abruptly demanded his business.

"To put you in the way of making good

your recent losses, and holding your head as high among your neighbours as ever you did," replied Marshall.

"That is more than you can manage, I suspect," answered Amos; "and, to say the truth, I have no particular fancy to lay myself under obligations to such as you."

"Why so?" demanded the other. "Are not our principles of religion and politics the same? Do we not both hate the aristocracy? Is it not the great wish of our hearts to see an end put to corruption of every sort, so that all men may possess equal rights, and the condition of all be improved?"

"This is mighty fine, Mr. Marshall," replied Amos; "but I doubt whether we shall agree as to the means of effecting so much good. I am not one that would stir up the servant to rebel against the master."

"No, but you would stir up the tenant to rebel against the landlord; and the duty of obedience—if it be a duty—is, I take it, quite as binding in the case of landlord and tenant, as in reference to those whom you are pleased to describe as servant and master."

"What! are not my labourers my servants? Don't I pay them wages, and are they not bound to obey me?"

"Undoubtedly you pay them wages, for which you get their labour in return. As far as their labour is concerned, they are certainly your servants,—that is to say, you can put them about any such job as you may fancy. But, apart from this, they are as much the masters of their own proceedings as you can be. In fact, they are traders. They sell their labour to you for your money; but they do not sell their personal liberty."

"I don't understand such doctrine: I don't see what right a man whom I employ has to object to any arrangements which I may choose to make. Is it not always competent to me to dismiss him?"

"Without doubt it is: but when you have dismissed him, you have inflicted as great a loss upon yourself as upon him,—that is, supposing you to need his services, and that there is nobody standing by to fill his place."

"Look you, Mr. Marshall; I want none of your lectures on political economy. It is quite clear to me, that every person whom I employ—who is fed, and clothed, and his family maintained by my money, is my servant: and it is equally clear to me, that where there are so many more labourers than are needed, a large proportion of them must either be paupers or

servants to the parish. I defy you to get out of that, though you talk all night about it."

"I admit that wherever there is a greater number of labourers than can be provided with regular employ, the surplus must become paupers,—and, according to the horrid laws now in force, worse than servants—serfs, slaves to the parish. But then, it is only because your unjust laws, by throwing the burthen of maintaining this surplus on the occupiers of land, binds down the poor man to some particular parish as completely as if he had been born in thraldom. Let these laws be repealed, and the rich and the poor will stand in their natural relation to each other; both being free to carry their capital where they choose, and both being left to make the most of it."

"I wish to God we saw it brought to this!" exclaimed Mr. Amos with a sneer. "Relieve me of the burthen of helping to maintain a parcel of useless and turbulent paupers, and you may call the paupers themselves by any name you please."

"Well, well," observed Marshall, perceiving that he had accomplished his end, and that the ice in which Mr. Amos had at first encased himself was thawed, "we are only wandering from our proper subject. I repeat, that I can

put you in the way of retrieving all your losses, even though twice as great as I suspect them to be, provided you are willing to embark with me in a little secret business, which needs capital, caution, and courage. Of the last commodity I know you to possess a very large stock; can you furnish any portion of the two former?"

"When I have heard the nature of the business," answered Amos, "I shall be better able to reply. How is this stock-in-trade to be used?"

"Not in maintaining the arbitrary laws of our arbitrary government, certainly," replied Marshall. "I suppose you would not be very reluctant to enrich yourself, even though in doing so it might be necessary to diminish the King's revenue?"

"You know very well that I am not much given to respect kings, nor of course to contribute willingly to their revenues. If that be the only obstacle in the way of a successful trade, I shall not be stopped by it from embarking."

"You answer as I expected," said Marshall. "Now mark me: you have all seen how well my business has thriven, even while I undersold every other tradesman in the place, and

for many miles round it. Has it never occurred to you to ask by what means I contrived to accomplish this? Something, no doubt, may be done everywhere, provided a man have such a command of capital as will enable him to go into the market and pay ready money for his goods; but no amount of ready-money dealings will ever render his trade a thriving one, who sells in the country at a less charge than he can purchase for in London. How do you imagine I have contrived to supply the good people in Waltham and the adjoining parishes with tea, spices, tobacco, and other necessaries, nearly thirty per cent. under prime cost?"

"Unless you smuggle your goods, I can't tell how you manage it."

"You have hit it exactly, Mr. Amos: I do smuggle my goods—and smuggle to an extent far beyond what you or any other man in this neighbourhood ever dreamed of. I tell you, that if you give me an order for a smuggled piano-forte, or a chest of drawers, or a set of dining-tables and chairs, I will buy them in Paris, and deliver them to you at any place you may name, within as short a space of time as will be required to convey and to execute the commission. What do you think of that?"

"First of all, that you are a monstrous rash

person, to put yourself so completely as you have done in the power of a comparative stranger; and next, that if what you say be true, you must have dealings with the devil. Why, the whole line of coast from Brighton to the Thames is watched night and day by the blockade men. I confess I can't imagine how you contrive to throw dust into fifteen hundred pair of eyes."

"But I do throw dust into them notwithstanding," replied Marshall, chuckling: "and as to trusting you with my secret, it is paying you no compliment that you don't deserve, when I say that I did so, because I felt perfectly secure that I should never be betrayed."

"No, I am not the man to turn informer," replied Amos, evidently becoming more and more interested in the discussion every moment; "you are therefore safe enough with me. But tell me, how is all this managed? In the first place, the capital embarked must be very large; and in the second, you must possess channels of information, and even the command of physical strength, such as it would pass our wit to calculate. You can't stand alone in the matter."

"I have not scrupled to put my own life in your hands, Mr. Amos," said Marshall; "but

you can't expect that I will entrust you with the secrets of others, till I know how far you are disposed to throw in your lot among us. What do you say to taking a share of the risk, and of course a share of the profit along with it?"

"I should be better able to answer the question, Marshall, if I saw the company's books, or had some other means of forming a fair guess as to the probable amount of the profits."

"The company's books are not here; neither am I more than a very humble partner in the concern; indeed, I can scarcely look upon myself as more than an agent: yet, if you will go home with me, I think that I shall be able to show you what will remove every scruple from your mind on the score of profits."

"Once again, Marshall," said Amos, solemnly; "is this commonly prudent behaviour on your part? You know nothing of me except by report; and yet you not only tell me tales, by repeating which I should cause a thousand unfriendly eyes to watch you, but you offer to place me in a situation where I may ruin you whenever I please."

"And once again," replied Marshall, frankly, "I repeat, that I believe you to be de-

serving of all confidence. If you are not to be trusted, who is?"

"Well, then, lead on," observed Mr. Amos.

Marshall did lead; and Amos following, they soon arrived at the dwelling of the former, into which they were admitted by means of a check key. There stood on a table in the passage a japanned tin lantern, through the perforations in the top of which a few rays of light were streaming, but which did not permit so much of the flame of the candle to be seen, as might, even had the door hung open, attract the notice of the passers-by. Marshall, after carefully bolting his door, took up the lantern, and whispering to his companion to tread lightly, for fear of awaking the housekeeper, raised a small portion of the lid, so as to allow a little more light to escape. He then moved on, Amos treading close in his rear, till they had passed through the shop, and reached a sort of wash-house or back-kitchen that lay beyond. Marshall, after closing and bolting that door also, drew back the tin cover of his lantern altogether, and passing it rapidly along the wall, ascertained, not only that the shutters were up in the window, and the back door closed, but that both door and

window were additionally darkened by curtains of thick sacking hung over them. This done, he handed the lantern to Mr. Amos, and advancing himself towards the fire-place, withdrew a brick from one part of the hearth, and inserting his hand into the aperture, raised the stone itself. Mr. Amos stooped forward, and holding the lantern downwards, beheld the mouth of a sort of cave, against which a ladder or trap-stairs leaned.

"Let us descend," said Marshall, in a low tone: "you won't see half the merits of my device by standing here, nor any portion of my treasure."

Marshall, now taking the lantern, got upon the ladder and went down; while Amos, having observed that there was a cellar underneath in which his companion found no difficulty to stand upright, followed without hesitation.

"Close the trap-door after you, pray," whispered Marshall. "Walls, they say, have both eyes and ears; and I should look extremely silly if my own back-kitchen were to appear in court against me."

Mr. Amos did as he was desired, and was astonished, while doing so, to observe that the ponderous stone moved with a facility which

showed with what skill it had been balanced. And now the mouth of the aperture being shut, the light streamed round in such volumes as to give him a pretty accurate notion of the sort of place to which he had been introduced. It was a cave, measuring perhaps eight feet in width, though apparently interminable in length. On either side of a narrow passage stood bales, casks, packages, and boxes, every one of which his companion assured him contained silks, laces, spicery, tea, tobacco, and spirits. There were also one or two cases containing musical snuff-boxes, trinkets, chains, and other fancy articles; several of which, to the unpractised eye of Mr. Amos, appeared to be of incalculable value. But this was not all. Again requesting his companion to follow, Marshall led him on to the end of the cavern, a space of perhaps thirty feet, where he beheld another trap-stair erected, and another flat stone fastened in the soil above.

"That leads to a bed of pinks in my garden," said Marshall, "which my people know how to remove and to replace; and through that door, as opportunity offered, those goods that you saw have been admitted. Once here, however, and all danger and difficulty are over. Many a valuable parcel your coaches

carry to town; and the fish-vans are the handiest things in the world. Now, then, what say you? are you willing to take a share in the concern? Say yes or no."

"I say yes, without hesitation," replied Amos. "Tell me only what you want me to do, how much money to advance, and how much danger to encounter; and, d—n me, I am your man for anything."

"We will arrange these points to-morrow," replied Marshall. "In the mean while, let me make you free of the cellar."

So saying, he drew forth a horn cup from behind one of the casks, and opening a case, took from it a bottle of champagne. The cork was drawn, and the confederates, at a couple of draughts, emptied the bottle. This done, they returned to the entrance. They re-ascended as they had gone down, carefully closed the trap-door, re-passed once more through the shop, and again shrouded the light. Finally, Amos being turned forth to the street, the grocer made fast his front door, and passed quietly to bed.

CHAPTER II.

CONFEDERATION.

"Now then, Mr. Amos," said Marshall to his friend, on whom, according to agreement, he waited next morning, "what do you think of my line of business, and of my mode of carrying it on?"

"That it is the cleverest thing I ever saw in my life," replied Amos: "deuce take me if I have slept a wink all night for thinking of it. How, in Fate's name, did you contrive to scoop that place out; and how have you managed to keep your secret so well these six months past?"

"The place that you were in last night was all scooped out and ready before I came into this country. You don't imagine that this is a new concern, do you? Why, the trade has been going on these thirty years; though my partners have been obliged to conduct it with increased caution of late, and more than once

to shift the position of their depôt. However, the point which you and I have to settle at present relates to another matter: you still keep to your engagement, of course?"

"Can you doubt it, my good fellow? Hang it! the prospect of such a business has put me quite into spirits again: for, to be honest with you, Marshall, that cursed fire ruined me quite."

"Then I take it you have not much money capital to advance?"

"Not a great deal, certainly; but I have a little, which I will throw in with tenfold satisfaction, because I cannot doubt of realizing from it, in a short time, more than enough to put me clear with the world. I have a couple of hundreds at your service, which I had set aside against rent-day next month, but which you can use, and welcome, in the mean while."

"Even a couple of hundreds may be turned to account," replied Marshall: "besides, we have a rule that no one can become a shareholder who has not contributed something to the stock-purse. For your own sake, therefore, I will take the money: but, to be candid with you, we look for more important services at your hands than your purse can accomplish. You are a bold, resolute man, fit to command

others in situations of difficulty and danger;—and the free trade is not carried on, you know, without incurring both difficulties and dangers. Are you willing to risk your person?"

"Most men know that a trifle is not apt to daunt me," answered Amos; "yet I own that I have some reluctance to appear before the world in the character of an avowed smuggler. Anything that requires a stout heart and a strong arm I am ready to undertake, provided my good name be not put in jeopardy."

"Unless you be much more wanting in prudence than I give you credit for," replied Marshall, "your name need never come before the world in any other light than attaches to it now. What is wanted, is a brave, active, intelligent man, who will take charge of a certain line of coast, who will make himself perfectly master of all its bearings, with the different by-ways through the woods and marshes that lead to it; and who, when anything is to be done, will have under his command people drawn from a remote part of the country, to whom his face and name will both be strange. You don't suppose that we are weak enough to put our leaders in the power of their men?"

"Well, and what more is this person to do?"

"Whenever it is determined to run a cargo, he will be informed. It will then be his business to repair to the spot fixed upon for assembling; to distribute his people in such a way as shall seem to him best calculated to ensure success; to avoid fighting if possible, but at all events to save the goods. All this, however, will of course take place under cover of night; so I don't see how your good name, or that of any other individual concerned in it, is to be hazarded at all. What say you to this?"

"And how may the leader be recompensed for the share of danger and fatigue which he undergoes?"

"By a per-centage on every article brought home. Suppose, for example, you were to act as captain to the Herne Bay gang, or the Sandwich Flats gang, or the Dungeness gang, or the Pevensey Bay gang, or any other gang, and to succeed in fetching here, or to any other of our depôts, say five hundred weight of tobacco, a dozen bales of silk, a hundred tubs of Geneva and Hollands, half-a-dozen chests of tea, with gloves, snuff-boxes, &c. in proportion, I will be bound to say that your per-centage as captain, independently of your profits as shareholder, would come to fifty pounds at the least:

and if you were so lucky as to manage this eight or ten times in the course of the year, I need not point out that your income would be pretty considerably increased."

"And how are the men collected, and how paid?"

"Oh, they are got easy enough. In times like these, when you farmers don't treat your people better than they deserve, we free-traders are never at a loss in finding hands. I tell you that some, both of the fighters and the workers, come from the very heart of the country. We don't object to take the people along the coast, to be sure; though, as I said before, we are always very careful to use them at a distance from their own homes, and under leaders that are strange to them: but for fighters we generally prefer your inland people, as less likely to be recognised."

"Well, but explain to me: what do you mean by fighters and workers? what is the difference between them?"

"Why, this. Say that we receive intelligence of the proposed landing of a very valuable boat, two nights hence, on the beach below Lydd. Our first business will be to warn the captain of Lydd, that he may hold himself in readiness to meet a gang either at the ruins

of St. Mary's Chapel, or at some other point inland, leaving to him the duty of fixing on the route which they shall follow either in advancing or retreating. Meanwhile, our constables about Lenham, or some other inland place, are directed to get together twenty fighters—that is, men who shall carry guns,—with a due proportion of threshers—that is, people armed with flails for close quarters. These move down by ones and twos the day before, and find on their arrival at the place appointed perhaps sixty men or so, unarmed. Here the captain joins them; and, if everything goes on well, they march down to within a short distance of the landing-place, where they conceal themselves as well as they can. By-and-by a light will be seen in the offing, as a signal that the boat is approaching. No notice is taken of it till it is repeated, when of course the Coast-blockade, as well as our people, are on the alert; and then, in order to deceive them, a corresponding light is shown, perhaps a mile off, by persons planted there for the purpose. Thither the Coast-blockade hasten; when, having allowed sufficient time for their removal out of your way, you throw up two rockets, one after the other. Instantly the boat replies, and is run on shore. Nor have you been idle

a moment; for, while the man is getting the rockets ready, you, who know that all is as it ought to be, run in towards the water-mark; and your fighters forming a couple of lines, your workers dash between them, and each loading himself, runs as if the devil chased him into the interior. If you manage matters so that the boat shall be unloaded ere the guard return, it is so much the better for yourselves; if otherwise, then you must make the most of it. But remember that it is not your business to fight for victory: what you want to accomplish is, that the landing of the goods shall be protected, and the boat shoved off and got to sea; and whenever this is done, it becomes your business to retreat. Of course, if the guard follow, you take care to check them, till you believe that the workers are beyond reach of being overtaken. And then away you go, dispersing to the four winds, and crying bad luck to the hindmost. Do you understand the sort of thing now?"

"I think I do," replied Amos, while his eye brightened considerably. "There must be some fun in all that. Hang it! I think I should like it for its own sake. But how are your workers and fighters paid?"

"That too depends a good deal on the

nature of the job. I should say, however, that in general his night's work is worth five shillings to the worker, and seven and sixpence to the fighter."

"And after all these charges are paid, do you mean to tell me that a profit remains?"

"Ay, such a profit, that if we succeed in running only one cargo out of three, we are gainers."

"Who the deuce would follow what is called an honest trade," exclaimed Amos, "if he can coin money in this way by smuggling! Look ye, Marshall, I am your man for that sort of work. D— me, I don't think the Coast-guard will bully me out of a cargo if I once begin to land it."

"I have no fear that they will," replied Marshall: "but recollect what I told you, we never wish to have fighting if it can be helped. Besides that there is no great amusement in getting men shot like dogs, there is always a hazard of detection if our wounded fall into their hands. You, to be sure, and such as you, have nothing in the world to fear; but as the men carry the goods to the depôts, we are never quite safe,—neither do we feel ourselves safe when one or more of

them chance to be taken. I admit that in general they are as staunch as pointers, but it's no use incurring unnecessary hazards."

"Well, and when may my services be wanted?"

"As soon as ever you have made yourself so thoroughly acquainted with the bearings of the coast, as to be able to take charge of a bit of work, and get the goods conveyed to my garden. In fact, we have been stopped longer than we wished; first, because that ass Dick Solley proved unequal to his work, and got himself into a scrape with the machine-breakers; and next, because your cursed patrol has considerably embarrassed us. Now, how long is that foolish thing to go on?"

"Dick Solley! you don't mean to say that you entrusted him with the secret which you have confided to me?"

"Not to the same extent," replied Marshall; "I saw too much through my man to put myself entirely in his power: but I did tell him a great deal more than I ought to have done. However, we disposed of him in the best way in the world. He is gone where nobody will regard his tale if he publish it by beat of drum. It was a good job getting

him into that scrape: all that I lament is, that Wall, who really was a man, should have crossed the herring-pond with him?"

"And so you really urged them on to commit these outrages?"

"I! not I—I never said so. What interest had I in the matter at all?"

"Oh, none whatever," said Amos drily. "But as concerning the patrol, my opinion is, that it need not stand in our way a moment. Only make choice of my night for being out, and I will take care that no other watcher shall intrude upon my beat, which will, of course, be on the side of the parish most convenient for our purpose. In fact, the patrolling plan is in our favour: I go abroad on duty, and nobody thinks of wondering at it; but if I were to go without any apparent reason, my own people at least might become curious about it. It strikes me, that I have only to ride over the country once or twice, and then I shall be ready for my work."

Marshall, after a moment spent in deliberation, admitted the justice of this reasoning. It was therefore arranged between them that Mr. Amos should accompany him that day to the sea-side; and as the grocer kept a capital black horse, fit both for draft and the saddle,

the confederates were mounted and ready within the hour. Their ride was one of great interest to both, and of positive excitement to one; for he was shown, during its progress, the exact limits of his command, and received a still greater insight than had yet been afforded him into the general method of conducting the free trade. The houses engaged in it had, as it appeared, regular agents both in France and Holland. Many of these were of a rank in society which exempted them from every suspicion; and all were intelligent, shrewd, skilful, and scrupulously honest. Still, the overseer could not draw from his companion any disclosure of names.

"It would do you no good if I were to give you a written list into your own hand," replied Marshall: "let my assurance content you, that some of the wealthiest companies in the City have an interest in the concern, and that the capital which you embark is as safe as if you lodged it in the Bank. Neither must you press me yet respecting our means of conveyance. I have already said that we make frequent use of the coaches, sometimes with the knowledge of the drivers, but more frequently without; and that every fish-van is at our disposal when we desire it: but I cannot tell you

more. By-and-by, after you have done business with us for a while, all our secrets will be revealed to you. In the mean while, you understand that the whole line of seaboard, from that point of land on the north, to the light-house on the south, is your province. Examine it carefully. Take your observations, both as to the fittest places for landing and for hiding, as well as assembling your men; and as soon as you feel that you are in a condition to turn your experience to account, let me know."

Having settled this matter, the associates returned to Waltham, after arranging that, as far as possible, the intimacy which must needs spring up between them should be concealed from the world. Of course, the visits of the one to the other must be made for a while under cloud of night, and the coldness that used to mark their respective deportments be gradually broken down. Nor was it difficult to fall upon a convenient method of accomplishing this. Mr. Amos, for the obvious reasons that Marshall was a liberal, and sold his commodities cheap, gave him from day to day more of his custom, till, in the end, Marshall's was the only shop at which he dealt for such articles as were to be had there. Once this point was settled, all the rest became

easy. Marshall was understood to be a man of substance, and might therefore, though in trade, be treated as an equal by a farmer. Marshall, moreover, was not troubled with any of those niceties of feeling, to which Mr. Sankey and Mr. Rigden were subject. He considered it no degradation to pay court to Mr. Amos's housekeeper, or to treat with marked attention her eldest daughter, a girl barely turned of sixteen. The housekeeper, on the other hand, being flattered by a show of respect which no one besides afforded her, soon became his friend; and Mr. Amos was told that, "indeed a rich tradesman was as good as a poor farmer any day, and for the most part a great deal more intelligent." Thus, by good management on both sides, a state of things appeared to be accidentally brought about which it was the object of both parties to establish; and before a week had expired, Marshall was rated among the most intimate and familiar friends of the liberal overseer of Waltham.

Is it supposed that on Marshall's part all this was the mere offspring either of mercenary designs or of disinterested friendship? Neither the one nor the other. Marshall was a great admirer of female beauty, particularly in its early stages. He had seen, and been inflamed

by, the opening charms of Charlotte Amos, almost from the time of his first arrival in the place; and long and patiently he had striven to bring himself into such a situation as would afford him the opportunity of making her personal acquaintance. The method which he adopted to attain that end was certainly not such as men under like circumstances are wont to pursue, yet it had succeeded; and as he was gentle in his manners, plausible in his address, open with his presents, and much more intelligent than any other person with whom she came in contact, the fact that it had succeeded became ere long as much a matter of congratulation to the girl as to himself. For, as I stated elsewhere, Mr. Amos had spared no expense in the education of his children; and they were, in consequence, as one by one they returned home, subjected to a thousand mortifications and annoyances, such as they would not otherwise have experienced. The exact nature of the connexion between her father and mother, for example, was not concealed from Charlotte; she had it not only from themselves, but from others; and, shunned and looked cold upon by young people better born, but much less highly educated than herself, her whole existence became

one continued series of humiliations. Her temper, naturally gentle, was not soured under this treatment, but her spirit was completely broken by it, while the very warmth of her feelings exposed her to become the dupe of almost any one who should strike at her principles through the medium of her affections. Poor girl! hers was indeed a hard case; and no one more accurately calculated the extent of that hardship, or better knew how to make use of it, than Mr. Marshall.

CHAPTER III.

FREE TRADE.

For a full fortnight after their intimacy began, Mr. Amos, at Marshall's recommendation, busied himself all day long in making reconnoissances of the face of the country. He got upon his horse each morning at an early hour, and, very much to the surprise of his family, never made his appearance again at home till long after dark. During his absence, Mr. Marshall day after day strolled down, by some accident or another, in the direction of Ware farm. His arrival was always hailed with undisguised satisfaction by the housekeeper; and as he never came either empty-handed or unprepared with some kind expressions to Charlotte, she too began by degrees to look for his coming as for an event to be desired. For there is no period in a female's life so open to the impressions of kindness under all circumstances, but more especially situated as Charlotte Amos

was, as that which interposes itself, if I may so speak, between childhood and maturity. Gentle, confiding, conscious of the necessity under which she is laid of clinging to some one for support, the girl just let loose from school, yet excluded from the companionship of women grown, receives every mark of attention from those of the other sex not only with gratitude, but with wonder. And if she chance to have received in other quarters rebuffs and mortifications that gall her, then is his position who treats her differently one of perilous superiority —perilous not to the poor girl alone, for that all who look about them must perceive, but to the individual himself, who thus, perhaps, unconsciously establishes a supremacy in her heart. Though he kept a grocer's shop, and mixed familiarly in the way of business with the labouring classes in Waltham, no man knew these truths more fully than Marshall; nor was any one better inclined to turn them to such uses as his own humours or the accidents of time might suggest.

Charlotte Amos had received her education in a French convent. Uninstructed in the principles of that religion which her father utterly denied, she went to Boulogne a perfect child of nature, believing that there was a God, because

she heard that such a being existed, and not absolutely unacquainted with the contents of the Bible. Beyond this, however, neither her knowledge nor her wishes extended; and she was of course an admirable subject on which the sisterhood could work. Finding that she knew nothing of the opinions of the Reformed Church, one of the nuns took her under her own especial guidance, and did her best to fill the poor girl's head with the most extravagant fictions. But Charlotte, who had attained to her thirteenth year before she entered the seminary, was by far too clever to give credit to such fables. She was old enough, moreover, to recollect that her father had repeatedly sneered at the doctrines of the parsons in general; and concluding that these fictions made up a portion of them, she rejected, not them only, but the leading truths of religion, because in her own mind they were associated. No doubt there was a Protestant governess who did her best to check the evil; but the Protestant governesses who attend the convents even of liberalized France have very little influence, except with those pupils whom their parents particularly recommend to them; and as Mr. Amos would have laughed at the idea of putting his child under the care of one religious instruct-

ress rather than another, Charlotte derived from the presence of the lady in question very little benefit.

Such was the girl who, at the age of sixteen and a half, found herself suddenly thrown into the society of a man of thirty, who, though ostensibly but a tradesman, soon contrived to satisfy her that his tastes and acquirements were far beyond those of the persons whom she was accustomed to meet at her father's table. Marshall was not only an agreeable, but an educated man. With the French language he was familiar; he had read a great deal, and could talk pleasantly on almost every subject; and, above all, he was kind and considerate in his deportment. His attentions to Charlotte herself, in particular, were of the most delicate description; indeed, it seemed as if he wished her to look upon him rather in the light of an elder brother than anything else. Now, there is no bearing more dangerous than this when applied to the very young. Charlotte, who received few marks of attention from her father, and none at all from anybody else, soon began to look upon Marshall as the only real friend she had in the world; and once that idea is established in the mind of a girl of her years, the result in which it must terminate there

needs no prophet to foretel. The girl worshipped Marshall as a superior being: within ten days from the opening of their acquaintance,—and ere the fortnight expired, though he had never talked to her of love, she was altogether at his mercy.

Time passed, and Amos having made himself thoroughly acquainted with the face of the surrounding country, declared his readiness at any given moment to take charge of the running of a cargo. Marshall, who had received his two hundred pounds and transmitted them to the proper quarter, made his report where it was expected, and a night was fixed for the landing of a boat, of which the lading was understood to be of great value. Nothing could exceed the coolness and decision of the new leader, as well in making his previous preparations as in managing the enterprise. The cargo was landed, carried off, and conveyed to the depôt, without a life having been endangered or a shot fired; and a very considerable sum of money rewarded Amos for his exertions. Of course, he was delighted with his business and prospects: Marshall became more and more an inmate of his family every day, till the intimacy which had thus sprung up between them began to attract the attention of the parishioners, and

more than one idle joke passed current in consequence.

For a while Amos's duties as captain of a certain extent of coast neither interfered with his ordinary occupations as tenant of Ware, nor drew him, except on particular service, to any distance from home. At the end of six weeks, however, more frequent demands began to be made upon his time and intelligence. Though still kept profoundly in the dark as to the persons with whom he was associated, he received through Marshall repeated communications, all of them applauding his courage and skill, and some requiring increased exertions in the common cause. It was now no unfrequent case to find himself laid under the necessity of undertaking a journey into Sussex, and once at least as far as Hampshire; his expenses being duly paid and a present made to him over and above, he knew not by whom. It is scarcely necessary to say, that a life of continual excitement and profit accorded well with the tastes and circumstances of the man. Amos found himself growing richer day by day: he imagined that he had discovered Raleigh's El Dorado, and rejoiced in the delusion; while one whom nature ought to have made, and had made, most dear to him was suffering, less perhaps from his imme-

diate neglect, than from his previous mischievous training.

Thus days and weeks passed, throughout a considerable portion of which Marshall took care to be continually present with Charlotte. The mother of the latter, either trusting too much to the inequality of years between them, or, it may be, nothing loth to secure a wealthy husband for her child, not only gave her countenance to this intimacy, but by continually withdrawing, and leaving the couple to make the best use of their time, invited its continuance, till Charlotte certainly, and Marshall in appearance, began to look as if they felt awkward at being thus thrown upon one another's conversation. By way of relieving his fair companion from her restraint, Marshall once or twice, when her father was from home, invited her to walk abroad. She yielded to the request without scruple; and never had she known the rapture of a stroll by moonlight till she began to indulge in such a recreation with such a companion. As might be expected, Marshall invariably led her away from the noise and tumult of the village. They strolled down to the river-side, or taking their course through the wood that skirted the bottom of the meadow, watched in mute rapture the silvery light

as it broke through the bare branches overhead; and then, from time to time, some quiet ejaculation would burst forth, as if the heart, overcharged with feelings, knew not how longer to suppress its workings, though the lips might refuse to give full utterance to words, at the best very inadequate to describe ideas that defy the power of language to portray them. Perilous indeed were such scenes to one circumstanced as was Charlotte Amos; and long before the first month of spring came in, she knew to her sorrow that they never lead to good.

Meanwhile, the free trade, liable as it always must be to frequent and calamitous interruptions, went on upon the whole thrivingly. The cavern under Marshall's washhouse, for example, was never empty, though repeated packages, both by coach and van, went off from it, and the business at the shop brought in as large returns as it had ever done. For, in spite of Coast-blockade, parish patrols, and all other lets and hinderances besides, the contraband flourished—a consummation no small portion of the merit of which belonged to Mr. Amos. He was not only brave—a quality which had never been denied him—but he was vigilant, cautious, and full of resources; insomuch, that

to count upon perfect success, whenever the enterprise chanced to be committed to his guidance, grew into a habit with all ranks of persons connected with the trade. Even in the contraband, however, as in other pursuits, surpassing skill is sure to bring upon its owner surpassing trouble. Amos found himself gradually entrapped into the management of a circle of business which became wider every day, till the whole line of coast, from Brighton to the Nore, became in some degree subject to his management. It is scarcely just to say that he murmured at this. He did not murmur; for there is a feeling, be it of gratified ambition or vanity flattered, which induces men to bear cheerfully such toil as an admission of their own excellence lays upon them. But of the comforts of home he soon began to know nothing, except from recollection, and even that became continually more faint. At last indeed it came to this, that a day spent at Ware was not less of a treat to him than to the inmates of the place who looked up to him; for seldom indeed were they allowed to share one another's society, and scarcely ever to exchange those endearments which their relative positions entitled them mutually to expect.

"You don't look well, Charlotte," said Amos to his daughter, on one of the few evenings which he found himself at liberty to pass in her company; "you have lost your colour, and are getting very thin. What is the matter, child?"

"Oh, nothing, papa—nothing, I assure you," replied Charlotte with a languid smile; "unless it be that I fret myself to death because I now see so little of you. What can you be doing so continually from home, and out night after night, as has lately been the case with you?"

"Never mind what I do, child, so long as I earn the means of keeping you and your brothers and sisters respectably: and, hear me, never trouble yourself to put such a question again, either to me or to anybody else. Whenever I am in the humour of confiding the history of my proceedings to you, I will do so without being asked; and I recommend you not to thrust your head unnecessarily into other people's affairs."

"La, now, Mr. Amos," interposed the housekeeper, "how can you answer so gruffly! I am sure Letty did not mean to be impertinent; and there's no use in jibing young people at that rate."

"I did not mean to jibe you, child," said

Amos, perceiving the tears gather in Charlotte's eyes: "no, no, not a bit of it. Come hither, love; give me a kiss. There, there, I am not angry with you, not a bit of it. But you are poorly, love—I see you are; what is the matter?"

Charlotte, not much accustomed to be addressed in an affectionate tone by her father—who, albeit he loved her tenderly, was rude even in displaying his milder feelings—became only more and more overcome by this treatment. The tear which had gathered in her eye and stood there soon burst its bounds, and another and another followed in rapid succession over her haggard cheek. She buried her head in her father's bosom, and sobbed aloud.

"Now, Letty, dear," exclaimed he, powerfully affected, "this is what I cannot at all comprehend. There must be something much more than common the matter. Why do you weep so? What is it that ails you?"

"Oh, nothing, papa, dear papa—nothing at all, I assure you: but I wish you were not so much from home—I wish you never had been so much from home."

"Why so, child? what harm do you suffer from my absence? Have you not everything here that you can desire?—your music, your

piano, your drawing-book, your needlework? How can my absence affect you one way or another? Surely your mother does not presume to behave ill to you?"

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Charlotte, eager as it seemed to hinder her mother from catching that unkind allusion; "my mother is all to me that a mother can be: yet I have sadly, sadly wanted you;—oh that you had never left us!"

"Good God! woman," cried Amos, addressing his housekeeper, "what have you been doing with my daughter? If I thought you capable of using a child of mine harshly, by heavens I would send you packing at a moment's notice! Have you forgotten that you have no legal claim upon me for maintenance, beyond what my own inclination may afford?"

"I have never used your daughter harshly, Mr. Amos," replied the degraded creature who superintended his household affairs; "if I had, I should have been the most unnatural of monsters; for though I may have no legal claim upon you, she has the same claim upon me that she has upon you. You forget that she is my daughter as well as yours?"

"What! am I to be branded by a ——?"

"Hush, hush, papa! for God's sake, hush!"

cried Charlotte, eagerly putting her hand before his mouth; "do not speak harshly to my mother, at least in my presence. Alas! alas! you know not how every word that you utter wrings my heart."

"I never would speak harshly to your mother, child, if she was not too apt to forget herself. But I will never allow her to assume the airs of a wife in my presence, that she may depend upon,—or consider herself your equal, or the equal of any honest child of mine."

The unfortunate woman concerning whom this strange language was used, had been too long accustomed to the upbraidings and reviling of her keeper, to sustain from them more than a temporary mortification. On the present occasion, therefore, she did what she had often done before,—she withdrew to another room till the gale should blow over; while Amos, as if relieved by her departure, took his daughter on his knee, and began again to question her as to the cause of her dejection. She persisted, however, in asserting that there was no cause for it. She repeated, indeed, over and over again, expressions of regret that her father had so much absented himself of late, and mixed them up with urgent entreaties that he would not do so in future.

But beyond this he could draw nothing from her, and was beginning to desist from the attempt, when the servant girl opened the parlour-door, and Marshall entered. In an instant Charlotte sprang from her father's lap, as if she had been surprised in some unworthy or indelicate situation. A deep crimson flush overspread her cheeks, the tears that had previously flowed in showers became congealed in their fountain, and her voice faltered, as she returned the visitor's salutation. Marshall's glance, likewise, would have indicated to a minute observer the working of some secret and perhaps anxious feeling within. He blushed slightly, faltered somewhat in his speech, and appeared confused; but he was not a sort of person to be thrown entirely, or for any length of time, off his guard. Before the greetings usually given and taken in such circumstances had passed, he was himself again,—that is to say, calm, cool, collected, and civil almost to the extent of obsequiousness.

"I want one word with you in private, Mr. Amos," said he.

"Surely, surely," replied the other.

"Leave us, Letty, for a minute or two; our confab won't last long, and I will ring the bell when it is over.—That child is not well, Mar-

shall," continued he, as the girl rose to withdraw; "and for the life of me I can't think what is the matter."

"I must say one word to you before you go," whispered Charlotte to Marshall as she passed him. Marshall answered with a glance of assent, and she disappeared.

CHAPTER IV.

SCHEMES AND FANTASIES.

"I HAVE come to acquaint you," said Marshall, as soon as the door was closed, "that a communication has just been made to me which will render it necessary for you to bestir yourself very shortly, under the most delicate circumstances. A boat will leave Rochelle at one o'clock to-morrow morning, laden with a cargo so valuable, that its seizure would involve us all in very heavy losses, if not in positive ruin. It is arranged that the goods shall be landed somewhere between Dymchurch and Dungeness; the exact spot to be indicated, after the first signal shall have been given, by the letting off of three blue lights. The signal for the boat is to be, first one flash, to denote that she is on the coast; and then two, to imply that her crew are ready to run her ashore anywhere. What say you? are

you prepared to start betimes in the morning, and to superintend the affair ?"

" Quite ready," replied Amos, " if my presence be absolutely required. But supposing no more serious obstacle to stand in the way than you have just stated, I really don't see why the captain of Romney Marsh should not manage the matter quite as well as I."

" Ay, if there were no more serious obstacles in the way. But there are such obstacles. Some devil has betrayed us. We have ascertained that the Custom-house people are awake to what is going to happen ; and, what is worst of all, there is no time to stop the expedition. Unless, therefore, you be on the spot, I for one despair of saving a stiver's worth."

" Why not direct your people to leave the boat's signal unanswered? In that case, she will of course put back, and the goods will be saved, to be brought over at a more convenient opportunity."

" There again you are mistaken. The custom-houses on the opposite side have all been put up to what is going on ; and though they mean to connive at the lugger's sailing, they will be on the alert to hinder her from getting back till she shall have been overhauled."

"Pooh, pooh! don't think of humbugging me. What though they do overhaul her?—as she will not be laden with articles that are contraband in France, why should the French custom-house refuse to pass her?"

"I tell you that there are cruisers without end sent out to intercept her, with row-boats and gallies innumerable; and as to goods contraband in France, half her lading is as much liable to seizure in a French port as in an English. Besides, we are under positive articles to deliver certain things in London against a certain hour;—and let happen what will, this cargo must be run. Of course the per-centage will be increased in proportion to the risk. What do you say? are you willing to incur some hazard for the sake of a great gain,—such a gain as may enable you, if you desire it, to withdraw from an active part in the business ever after?"

Amos was silent for several minutes, as if weighing the amount of risk against the probable amount of profit. At last he declared his willingness to undertake the perilous service proposed to him, on condition that he should never again be required to go upon any expedition except such as his own fancy might tempt him voluntarily to undertake. To this

Marshall readily agreed; and then followed a general discussion of the proposed plan, together with a consultation as to the amount of force that might be required, and the extent to which it would be admissible to carry the principle of resistance.

"As to the latter consideration," observed Marshall, "that must be left entirely for yourself to determine: all that I am authorized to say is, that the company never felt the same degree of anxiety about any other cargo. If it be lost, we are knocked up for the whole season at least; if it be saved, we shall all be in clover."

"That is," answered Amos, "neither life nor limb must be considered, so that the goods are not lost. Very well, Marshall; you may go; and if you have any opportunity of communicating with our secret partners in the course of the day, you may tell them that either their prize shall be brought safe to shore, or my carcase shall be left to fatten the crows in Romney Marsh."

"Then there is no fear as to the result," said Marshall, rising and preparing to withdraw.

"Won't you stay and have some supper with us?" demanded Amos. But this the other

declined; indeed, it appeared from the unwonted restlessness which, in spite of an evident endeavour to conceal it, gave a tone to his manner, that he already felt as if he had sat too long. He therefore wished his associate good-night, and departed. But he went not farther than the ruined barn, ere he was joined by one who seemed to have waited impatiently for his coming, and who, putting her arm through his, walked with him through the orchard, and down towards the bank of the river. For a while they walked in silence; but at last Charlotte spoke.

"What has been your business with my father to-night, Marshall? You never come to him in this way but he goes off somewhere—I fear for no good purpose. When is all this to cease?—and when am I to be at liberty to speak to him of what has passed between us, and what cannot long be concealed?"

"You would not act so mad a part as tell him *all* that has passed between us?" demanded Marshall. "Have you forgotten how irritable he is, and how very apt he would be to make both of us repent it?"

"Not when I assure him of your perfect good faith, and of the pledges that you have given of acting honourably by me. But, oh!

Marshall, this is a wretched state of existence. Pray, pray let it come to an end soon. I cannot much longer answer for my own self-command, or for the consequences of his inquiries: he sees how ill I look, and he has begun already to question me on the subject."

"And what then, love?" replied Marshall, soothingly. "You don't fancy that it will ever enter into his head to suspect the truth? And if he did, could he with any justice upbraid you,—he who has set you such an example, and continues to set it?"

"Perhaps so," answered Charlotte; "and yet I do not think it is either delicate or generous in you to cast my mother's frailties in my teeth. She was a poor uneducated girl when my father did her wrong. I ought to have known better, and did know better, though I have erred even as she did. But that is not what I wanted to say to you. I tell you that I am miserable. It may be in your eyes an unkind determination, but so wretched am I, that I had wellnigh to-night told him all, and I cannot undertake to keep the secret many days longer. Judge, therefore, for yourself, whether it will be best for you to come forward openly in your true character, and so to fulfil your promises under his sanction; or that I should

show him how frail his child has been, and how cruelly his friend has taken advantage of her weakness."

"Have I not told you, Charlotte, more than once already, that considerations of the most urgent kind alone keep me from speaking to your father on the subject? Cannot you have a little patience. You know that I am not what to the people of Waltham I seem to be. There is gentle—ay, noble blood in these veins, which will not indeed be dishonoured by my union with one so beautiful, but which renders it necessary that I should, for your sake, see my way clearly before I take a step that cannot be recalled. Is it fair, is it generous in you, to exhibit such distrust in one who has never given you cause?"

"I do not mistrust you, Marshall—God forbid that I should,—for, if I did, I would be the most heart-broken of creatures. But have some thought for my case, too, I entreat you; do not expose me to the world's scorn,—do not subject me to be thrust with contempt from beneath my father's roof."

"Fear nothing of the sort, dear girl," replied he; "your father will leave this to-morrow, to return probably the day after. He goes on an affair of the most vital importance; and when

he returns, if I am not, as I hope I shall be, in a condition to avow the footing on which we stand towards one another, at all events I shall put things in such a train as to clear off many difficulties. Be content, then, for eight-and-forty hours more: it is not a very protracted period to give to one who will make cheerfully such sacrifices on your account as few women would have a right to expect, and fewer still possess power to exact. You will give me eight-and-forty hours?"

"Ah! so it always is, Marshall. Eight-and-forty, and eight-and-forty, and eight-and-forty hours continually, till the poor dupe becomes at last an object at which Scorn may point her finger, and then the sooner she withdraws into a dark corner to die the better."

"Now Charlotte, dearest Charlotte, if I did not love as man never loved before, do you imagine that I could or would endure the language of reproach with which, whenever we now meet, you overwhelm me. Have you not read and heard enough to know that love, if it be not trusted, soon grows cold."

"I know not, Marshall, how that may be. But how is it—how can it be, when on one side everything has been sacrificed, on the other nothing?"

"Nay, nay, never say that. What was it that brought me here at all? Have I not told you how I was struck, while accidentally passing through the village, by beholding a creature beautiful as an angel; how I delayed my journey, ascertained who that angel was, conceived and carried into execution the scheme, romantic if you please, yet to me full of exquisite associations, which reduced me, for a time, to the rank of a village tradesman, and by so doing made me master of your affections? I admit that you have made sacrifices for me; but so the world would say have I made for you also. Yet I do not grudge them. Why should you grudge what in the end will prove to be no sacrifice at all, but a mere act of confidence, which cannot fail of endearing you to its object so long as life shall last? Nay, nay, Charlotte, never apply to me again the language of reproach; rather confide in me, as you have done, and believe that you shall have no cause to repent it."

"May God grant it!" sighed the poor girl. "But tell me, Marshall, when will these midnight excursions of my father end?"

"As soon as the important treaty which I am appointed to carry on, and in conducting which he displays so much skill and address,

shall be completed. It would not surprise me if he were to bring matters to-morrow to such a bearing as will enable me, by resuming my own character, to win the approbation of a grateful country, and place you in a position worthy of your beauty and your wit."

"And with whom are these treaties carried on?"

"You would not have me reveal secrets of state even to you, dear girl. Charlotte would despise her Palmerston—her—her—Marshall, if he were even for her gratification to betray the trust which his sovereign had reposed in him."

"Palmerston!" exclaimed Charlotte eagerly! —"gracious heavens! you cannot be Lord Palmerston!"

Marshall started — his hand shook as he grasped hers, and he exhibited other palpable tokens of embarrassment. "In the name of God!" he exclaimed, "how came you to make that discovery? I mean—I mean, how came you to fancy such a thing? No, dear girl, I am not Lord Palmerston; to you I am as yet no more than Marshall the grocer—and to others, at least in Waltham, I never shall be more. Therefore, groundless as the idea is, never, as you value my peace, breathe

a word of your suspicions to a living soul; but take me as I am, your own most true, most devoted, most faithful Marshall, who, whether in a high or a low station, will never forsake one bound to him by such ties as the great world knows not."

"Nay, but you called yourself Palmerston—you are Palmerston—you are Lord Palmerston; and I—oh! fallen, degraded, miserable girl!—how can I presume to hope that one so far exalted above me will waste one thought upon the heart that must and will break when it is left to its shame and to its sorrow?"

"Dearest Charlotte," exclaimed her companion, throwing his arm round her waist, "be my rank what it may, you shall never be deserted. All that I ask of you is patience: trust me, confide in me, leave me to work my way through the difficulties and perplexities that surround me, and be assured that the first use that I make of the freedom for which I now struggle will be to lay my title and fortune at your feet. How will the high-born dames burst with envy when I lead my sweet village bride among them! Their faded forms, their haggard cheeks, what a contrast will they present to the native beauties of my own gentle girl! And when those raven locks are tied

up with strings of pearl, and a coronet of diamonds glitters over them, Charlotte herself will scarcely believe that she is the same modest and retiring creature that used to blush from beneath a new bonnet because it was new, and eyes that saw her, and her only, sparkled at her confusion. Will not those be happy times, love?"

"Oh, no, no, no! Be Marshall still—my own Marshall, moving in a station to which I have been accustomed, associating with people that will not look down upon me;—be Marshall, and make me Marshall's bride; and the coronet and the bands of pearl I will give to those that value them, for in my eyes they have no value."

"Beautiful in thy distrust, not less beautiful when confiding, I know not when I am bound to love thee most. But be content, Charlotte, with this,—that your fate is now so closely linked with mine, that no power under heaven can henceforth disunite them. Believe me, too, that to me rank, station, wealth, with all the pomp and splendour they bring in their train, have no real charms. I spoke of them with apparent fondness, because, judging of you from what I know of the rest of your sex, I concluded that the prospect of sharing these things

with the man of your choice would add to your happiness. But if to you it be distasteful to enter into the great world, here, as Marshall the grocer, I am content to live; and here, as Marshall the grocer, will I die. Can I say more to satisfy you of the extent of my love, or to draw you into a confession that you entertain no distrust of my honour?"

"And I do not, I do not distrust you, Marshall! No, you are everything to me; and if to you I have made what others may call a sacrifice, believe me that neither now do I repent, nor shall I repent it hereafter. Only for my sake, dearest, bring these harassing negotiations to an end, and let me be with you openly at all hours, and under all circumstances, as one worthy of your respect not less than of your love, because commanding th respect of the world. For your sake, equally with my own, I ask this; because the time may come, when these beauties have lost their influence, that the memory of shame will operate upon you even more keenly than upon me; and to have my husband blush when he spoke of the first days of our wedded life, I could not look upon that and survive it."

"Nor shall you, best beloved," replied Marshall, imprinting a kiss upon her cheek: "once

let me settle this pressing affair, and all that you desire shall be accomplished. Meanwhile the night wears apace, and it may be prudent to return, lest your absence excite suspicion."

He led her back, resigned if not cheerful, as far as the gate that opened into the court, and then, after a second embrace, left her. She turned round in the middle of the court to watch his receding steps. They were light and rapid; and her heart sank within her as the thought crossed her mind that they sounded like those of a man who rejoices in the accomplishment of some favourite project. Poor girl! how would that heart have shivered into atoms had she overheard the brief but triumphant sentence to which he involuntarily gave utterance: "Oh, rare specimen of the romantic and the tender! rare example of woman's fondness and woman's vanity! A lord, nobody but a lord will content her. No doubt her brow would well become a coronet, if coronets fell from heaven in every shower; but, as it is, she must go without. Ha! ha! ha! I did not think it was possible to carry the thing this length. By heavens, I am but a learner in human nature after all, when I fancied that I was fit to teach."

CHAPTER V.

REFLECTION.

Mr. Amos had rung the bell several times during Charlotte's absence, and not finding her within call, had become fretful and angry. His mode of saluting her, therefore, when she entered the parlour, was not of the most conciliatory kind. But when he saw that the colour was restored to her cheek, and that she seemed cheerful even under his reproofs, his anger soon melted away.

"Ah, now you look something like yourself, Letty!" he at length said, while an expression of great kindness brightened in his eye. "What have you been about, puss, to bring back so suddenly the bloom that I had begun to fear would never return?"

"Only been out walking in the starlight, papa," answered she: "your stars are great restorers of female beauty, you know."

"Well, well, come and sit down beside me,"

continued he; "or rather, go and call your mother: I am afraid that I was too hard upon her, and I would not spend this evening otherwise than in comfort with my family."

Charlotte ran to obey this order, and returned almost immediately with her mother, who came, as the pointer comes that is accustomed to be beaten much more frequently than caressed, not knowing how to take the kindnesses of one whom she feared even when his endearments were most tender. She drew her chair, however, within the circle; and Mr. Amos being supplied with his pipe and a tumbler of punch, the little group presented for a while the appearance of an affectionate and therefore a happy family. But where there is a consciousness of moral degradation in the mind, though there may be momentary gleams even of domestic pleasure, there never has been, and there never will be, anything approaching to happiness. In the present instance, for example, irritation, perhaps remorse, soon broke in to disturb the tranquillity of the circle. Amos replied sharply to one or two remarks, by which his housekeeper desired to indicate her anxiety as to his welfare, and her great wish that he would go less frequently from home; while the colour that had brightened

Charlotte's cheek when she first returned from her walk faded completely, and she became as pale and as haggard as before. Her father gazed at her tenderly, and, as if softened by the spectacle, laid aside his pipe.

"If fortune favour me this trip, Letty," said he, "you and I must have a thorough explanation as to the cause of your dejection. I have seen it coming on these several weeks, and whether it arise from bodily sickness, or from the still more fatal sickness of the mind, I am determined that I shall get to the bottom of it. I say, mother," he continued, turning to his housekeeper, "have you given Mr. Holtum a hint of this? If not, I desire that he may be called in to-morrow; the child will otherwise go into a decline."

"No fear, papa—no fear of that. Once let me see you safe back again from the business, whatever it may be, that takes you from us to-morrow, and my health will return, because my mind will be at ease. Is it not enough to make the whole family fret to death, to find you harassed as you have been of late, nobody can tell why?"

"You cannot wish for an end of that worry more earnestly than I do. I trust, however, that it will end soon; and yet, God knows, it

may end fatally enough for me, and of course for you too, Letty."

"Don't speak so sadly, papa; otherwise I shall believe that there really is danger. Troublesome I know your business is, and delicate; but if *you* talk gloomily about it, we may indeed fear the worst."

"I don't talk gloomily, child—I am never gloomy: only, I can't tell why, there is a weight upon my spirits to-night such as no exertion enables me to shake off. Sing me a song, love,—a sweet, melancholy song; it may dispel the cloud that has resisted conversation."

Charlotte sat down at once to her instrument, and sang with great feeling, if with imperfect skill, such a ballad as she knew that her father admired. It was a plaintive national air, little likely to command attention in a London concert-room perhaps, but highly relished amid the more natural atmosphere of a Kentish village. Still, it did not affect her father as it used to do; so she tried another and a livelier strain. He listened, but evidently without being moved, for his gaze was still bent anxiously upon the fire, and he smoked like one buried in profound thought.

"What! won't that do neither, papa?" cried Charlotte. "Well, then, we will try——"

"No more, love, no more to-night: it won't do, I perceive; neither is it worth while to keep you up, when it is easy to see that you stand sorely in need of rest. Good night, love,—go to bed; and you, too, mother, leave me. I have some business to arrange before I lie down, and as I must be up betimes in the morning, the sooner I set about it the better."

The two females, accustomed to treat every word from the speaker as law, made immediate preparations to obey. Charlotte closed the piano with a sigh, and was following her mother, who had already retired, when her father called her back.

"God knows, Charlotte, whether I have been right or wrong all this while," said he, holding her in his arms, and kissing her beautiful pale forehead; "I cannot account for this weakness, but there is an impression on my mind that I have not dealt fairly by you, nor by your mother, nor by myself, nor by—by—by my Maker. What if the Bible should be true, after all?—why, then I am—no matter what. Do you ever pray, love? I never taught you to pray, to be sure,—but do you pray?"

"To whom ought I to pray, papa?" replied she, looking earnestly in his face. "I never heard you pray even to the great Creator; and

in France I saw them pray to saints and angels. I do not pray, papa—I do not know a prayer."

"Then learn one without delay, Charlotte; and be sure to introduce into it a petition for your father. Pray that in the opinions which he has all his life held he may be right; or if wrong, that some sign may be granted to him, such as shall convince his understanding and soften his heart: pray that he may find mercy if he should need it, or else that there may be no tribunal before which he shall be required to stand; pray that the troubled waters of his own thoughts may become smoother; pray that he may have strength to wrestle with his own pride, with his own obstinacy, with his own foul, foul, humours; pray—"

"You are ill, papa," cried the astonished girl, as she watched the working of his troubled countenance: "I never saw you look as you do now—I never heard you talk as you are now talking."

"I am ill—ill indeed, Charlotte," cried Amos, loosing her from his embrace and striding across the room; "but my sickness is not of the body. No; there is a disease that rankles more, a thousand times more, than your fever's heat or your ague's chill—the disease of a mind dissatisfied with itself—of a conscience awakened, yet finding no place of refuge to flee

to. What an account must mine be, if such accounts are taken! And you—what will be your fate, provided I be removed from you? Without a name, without a station—bastards—beggars—outcasts! Oh, my God! pardon! pardon! pardon!"

The wretched man stopped as he gave utterance to the last exclamation, and leaning against the wall of the room, permitted his head to sink lower and lower at each repetition of the word "pardon," till he had become almost double. His daughter ran towards him, and flinging her arms round his neck, moistened his cheek with her tears.

"Look up, papa; for my sake, look up! What can all this mean? You, whom no real dangers ever alarmed—who bore up under the misfortune of the fire—who set an example, during the disturbances, of courage and coolness to your neighbours—you to be thus unmanned! This must have reference to the business of to-morrow, or you are indeed ill—ill in body as well as mind."

Charlotte spoke in no tone of reproach, neither did it in the most remote degree enter into her contemplation to upbraid her father for his seeming weakness; but the perverse spirit of the man fired up as he listened to her exclamations.

"Unmanned, child!" exclaimed he, raising his head and looking proudly upwards: "I am not unmanned; no power on earth, or above the earth, or below, will ever have to boast that it unmanned me! Be my opinions right, or be they wrong, they are mine; mine they always have been, and mine they shall be to the last. So that fit is over, you see, and, as the play-book has it, 'Richard is himself again!' And now, my dear, go to bed; sleep soundly, and dream of better days to come; for I tell you, that by this day week I expect so to have settled all my affairs, that we shall be able to take our pleasure wherever we choose, without caring for any one. Good night, good night!"

"Shall I try to pray, papa, for myself and for you?" asked she, timidly.

"Pray, child?—no, to be sure not; what good comes of praying? Go and sleep: I take it, people lie down not to pray, but to rest and be fit for their work on the morrow. Take my blessing with you and go."

Once more he kissed her forehead, laying at the same time his hand upon her head. But there was now little of solemnity either in his tone or gestures; on the contrary, his features had resumed their usual stern expression; the hand that rested on her brow was firm, and

his whole bearing was that of a man who having made a violent effort to control himself had succeeded. Charlotte accordingly quitted the room; and he, after an hour spent in adjusting some private business, followed her example and lay down.

It was still profoundly dark when Amos, whose slumbers had been brief and broken, quitted his bed. A light was soon struck, by means of which he ascertained that the clock had just gone three; and congratulating himself on his good fortune in awaking thus early, he made haste to complete his toilet. Not under any circumstances was that operation with him one either of nicety or of long continuance, nor on the present occasion did he trouble himself to protract it. On the adjustment of his great-coat alone, indeed—a huge, shaggy, weather-tight wrapper—were any pains bestowed, and these aimed rather at convenience than appearance. Having taken from a drawer a brace of double-barreled pistols, he first of all ascertained that they were charged, and then deposited one in each of the side-pockets. He next flung the garment over him, buttoned it up, ascertained that the weapons made no show, and shifted them about and about till they ceased to tell tales; and lastly, buckling on his spurs and

grasping a hunting-whip, the handle of which was armed with an iron hammer, he stole softly from his chamber. To plant his candle in a horn lantern, and to proceed at once to the stable, was his next measure. There stood a noble black hunter, large-boned, full of muscle and blood, on the back of which he placed a saddle, and then leading it forth, he extinguished his light, put the stable-key under the door, and mounted.

"Now, Rattler, my boy," said he, patting the horse's neck, "we have a stiff journey before us, and both you and I may have our mettle tried at the end of it; but do your best, as you have always done, and you shan't want for corn, if it is to be had either for the buying or the taking."

The horse tossed his head proudly, as if he perfectly understood his master's address; and, answering to the shake of the bridle, bounded forward at a long, steady, and measured trot.

Amos passed through Waltham without perceiving the faintest symptoms of returning activity among its inmates. He had crossed one of the ridges of Barham Downs, moreover, and was considerably advanced in the open country that lies between, before the day began to dawn. It seemed, however, as if the morning

air, aided by the motion of his tried and trusty steed, had the effect of thoroughly dispersing whatever of gloom the occurrences of the previous night might have left about him; for the farther he proceeded from his home, and the associations connected with it, the more his courage rose, insomuch that once or twice he could not repress a smile as the memory of past weaknesses recurred to him. "Egad! I should have cut a pretty figure before Marshall, had he come in when the fit was upon me! And how to account for the thing!—deuce take me, if that is not the oddest part of the whole affair! I never felt so before; I never doubted—I never gave myself the trouble to doubt: and as to praying—hang it, I must have been unmanned indeed when it came to that! But never mind—it is past and gone. We have the future to look to now, Rattler; so step out, my pretty fellow, that both you and I may get some breakfast—of which I, for one, stand not a little in need."

It seemed as if the horse experienced the same desire with the rider, and entered fully into all his wishes; for he did step out with such excellent will, that in less than half an hour he arrived at the inn where Amos had determined to bait.

The hotel at which Amos alighted was one of those remarkable places of public entertainment to which we scarcely find a parallel in any other county than Kent. Composed partly of beams of timber, partly of bricks, with a sloping eaved roof, and a tall chimney in the centre, its ancient oak door gave admission to a sort of gallery, along the length of which ran a couple of deal tables, with benches or settles placed beside them. The fireplace, wide and capacious, and backed up with coloured tiles, on which were portrayed the fortunes of Moses, Jonah, and several of the Apostles, was faced to half its circumference by a high-backed bench; besides having a couple of seats, hollowed out of the wall, on either side of it. The windows were all casements leaded with narrow diamond panes; and the grate was an old-fashioned rusty dog, better adapted for the consumption of blocks of wood than of coal. Nor was the situation such as to fail of attracting the notice of the traveller. The house stood on the edge of a large moor overgrown with gorse, amid which frequent clumps of heath were interspersed, just where the low underwood that alone comes to perfection on so thin a soil closed in upon the picture. Amos had repeatedly breakfasted

at the Wheel before, and therefore saw no object in it, or around it, that was not familiar to him; yet, as he threw the bridle of his horse to the man who came to lead it in, he could not but feel that the scene was altogether an imposing one.

Amos entered the saloon or gallery, and moved towards the fire. He had already drawn his arm out of one of the sleeves of his great-coat, when, on passing through the interval that separated one of the backed benches from the other, he saw that they were not empty. Two men sat there, the dress and appearance of whom implied that they were certainly not agriculturists, whatever their occupation might be. They were both stout-made fellows, wore the dress of respectable mechanics, and had their great-coats hung up near them, as if they had recently alighted. Amos was never thrown off his guard, neither did it enter into his head to look upon the strangers with suspicion; but he took the precaution to disencumber himself of his wrapper with a little more caution than he had at first displayed, and doubling it up so as to hinder the butts of his pistols from protruding, laid it on one of the tables.

"A cold morning, gentlemen," said he,

" though pleasant for the season. You are travellers betimes, like myself, if, as I take it is the case, you have ridden a stage before breakfast."

" We have just alighted," replied one of the strangers, " and have this moment ordered a rasher to be fried for us: there is no reason why you should not join us if you be disposed. We will have the small table brought in here, and eat our breakfast more comfortably over the fire than at a distance from it."

Amos readily consented; and the rasher, with bread, butter, beer, and other viands, being produced, the three ate like men who lacked no appetite, and were not very nice as to the means of allaying it. When the meal was somewhat advanced, they began, as is customary under like circumstances, to beat about, rather than ask questions respecting one another's business.

" We are for the coast," said one of the strangers; " and, if we find the means handy, shall probably cross the water before dark. Whither may you be bound, friend, and on what business?"

" I am going to attend a market at Ashford," replied Amos; " though I may go a little farther than that, too, for I have some

friends in the Marsh, and being so near, I shall probably be tempted to pay them a visit. If you be for the coast, about Dover or even Folkstone, we don't go the same road, I am afraid."

"We are not very particular what road we follow," answered the stranger; "indeed, all this country is so new to us, that we should like to see a little more of it. Probably it is familiar to you, and therefore, if you be willing, you can act as our guide without difficulty."

"May I ask the nature of your business over the water?" observed Amos.

"Nothing very particular," said the stranger; "as much curiosity as anything else. Yet they tell me the people of Calais and Rochelle do a little business now and then too. Is it so?"

"Can't tell, indeed," replied Amos, looking attentively at the speaker. "If by doing business, you mean smuggling, I should think the Coast-blockade had pretty well put a stop to that."

"They say not," answered the stranger: "I am told that as much is done in that way as ever; indeed, I *have* heard that more is done, and on a greater scale."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Amos.

"Oh, they tell me that some of the most respectable houses in London are concerned; and that men lend a hand whom nobody would suspect of such a thing."

"I should doubt that," answered Amos, observing by a sudden flash of his eye that both strangers were examining his features very closely. "I have no faith in idle stories of that sort; they are easily got up, but generally hard to prove."

"Maybe," said the stranger, rising, and laying hold of Amos's great-coat, as if he had mistaken it for his own. "But it is time, Bill, that we were jogging."

"I'll trouble you, friend," cried Amos, "to drop that coat: it don't belong to you."

"God bless me! no more it does," answered the stranger, while his hand passed over the butt of one of the pistols; "I might have known that from the contents of the pockets."

"I always ride armed when I carry money about me," said Amos, taking his coat, and placing it beside him; "and I don't think I should be very scrupulous in using my weapons, if need were."

"Quite right," replied the stranger. "However, as we are not going the same way, we

must wish you good morning." So saying, he paid the bill for himself and his companion, and Amos in a few minutes afterwards saw them mount their horses and quit the inn door.

CHAPTER VI.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

When Amos, after resting an hour to refresh his steed, found himself again pursuing his journey and alone, his thoughts reverted in some degree involuntarily to the men with whom he had breakfasted. He could not say that he had observed about them anything which ought to excite suspicion, though he felt that suspicion did, for some reason or another, attach to them. What could they be doing there if, as they asserted, France was their object? Unless they had come across the country, a circumstance which their appearance by no means indicated, the Wheel lay decidedly out of their way; nor were they at all like men whose habit it was to frequent such houses of public accommodation. And that was not all: they first talked of being so ignorant of the bearing of the localities as to stand in need of a guide; and then, after asking some very

impertinent questions, rode off, without waiting to ascertain whether he would undertake the office which they had proposed to him. But, above all, the manner in which one of them took up and examined his great-coat. "D—n them!" said Amos at length, "if this were the age of highwaymen, I should say they belonged to the fraternity. But whatever they may be, it will be as well for themselves not to cross my path unnecessarily; for, deuce take me if I scruple to give them the contents of the implements which one of them at least seemed so anxious to examine."

Having come to this conclusion, Amos jogged on; his way lying first through an undulating country, of which the soil was cold and poor, though the general appearance was beautiful, and then along the brow of a broad hill, a portion of which was feathered with underwood, while the rest was open pasturage. It had, upon the whole, a continual ascent; on gaining the extreme ridge of which he pulled up for a moment and looked round. Beneath his feet lay an extensive plain, of which the boundary was formed on one side by the channel, on another by the horizon, on a third by a second range of chalky downs, similar to that from which he gazed, but far more magnifi-

cently wooded. Towns, villages, gentlemen's seats, with farms, scattered here and there at short intervals, fenced in and intersected by groves and hedge-rows, gave to the panorama, even in winter, an air of singular richness, which there needed but the green leaf on the bough, and the hop-garden in its pride of beauty, to render complete. Far off in the distance, moreover, were seen the white sails of several vessels which, taking advantage of the light breeze that blew, now pursued their voyage; and as the sun shone brightly, both they and the waters under their keels bore the exact tint which the painter loves to catch when it is his object to represent old Ocean in a gentle humour. It was indeed a splendid scene,—so splendid, indeed, as to excite admiration even in the breast of Amos, making him forget for the moment both the speculations in which he had recently indulged, and the business upon which he was soon going to enter.

Having indulged a feeling which was not very usual with him as long as he judged it expedient to do so, Amos again put his horse in motion,—restraining the spirit of the animal, however, which seemed unconscious of fatigue, and moving forward only at a foot's pace. It was not his object to reach Warehorn much

before dark; and so completely had he taken Time by the forelock, that as yet noon was barely passed. Gently, therefore, he descended the hill, and gently pursued his route, till the fine old tower of Ashford church uprose before him, and he found himself beside the arched gateway that leads into the yard of one of the most comfortable and best managed inns in the county—the Saracen's Head. He turned immediately to his right, and was in the act of giving the bridle to an hostler, when, to his great surprise, he beheld his companions at the Wheel lounging beside the door of one of the stables. The recognition was mutual; neither did the strangers seem averse to renew the acquaintance of the morning; they approached him, and he who had been the spokesman on a previous occasion spoke again now with a smile.

"We seem to be hunting one another, friend: I think we might have managed the thing better, and had the benefit of each other's company, by which *we* should have been greatly the gainers; for I doubt whether *you* will much profit by your trip, as this turns out not to be market-day at Ashford after all."

"So it seems," replied Amos with great composure; "and yet I don't think I shall be the

only loser by the adventure. Gentlemen bound for France will find that in going round by Ashford they have wasted time and money, both of which are of great value to most men."

"Very little to us, though," answered the stranger: "for, as I told you at the Wheel, ours is an excursion of pleasure as much as of profit. However, we have just ordered a chop, which will be ready in half an hour; and if you are disposed to give us your company, we shall be very glad to share it with you, as we did our rasher in the morning."

Amos, who was by no means delighted at this second rencounter, experienced very little disposition to cultivate the strangers' acquaintance; yet the overstrained prudence which induces men engaged in unlawful undertakings to affect an openness which under different circumstances they would probably not experience, operated with him so far that he closed with the proposition. Having desired his horse to be dressed and fed, and given notice that he might be required again in an hour and a half, he accompanied the strangers into the house, where, in a snug parlour, within the grate of which a cheerful fire was blazing, he found a table laid out for three.

"Are we to have any addition to our party?" asked he.

"Oh no," replied the stranger; "you are the only guest we expect; and we have expected you ever since, after losing our way, we found ourselves in the neighbourhood of this inn. You told us, you will recollect, that Ashford was your point: ours was then Dover; but we took a wrong turn somewhere among the Downs, and did not discover our mistake till it was too late. We then determined to have your company to dinner whenever you should arrive, provided the arrangement were agreeable to yourself."

Amos examined the speaker more closely than he had done in the morning, without, however, permitting the faintest appearance of anxiety to pervade his own countenance or manner. He was a tall, muscular, raw-boned man, with a fair complexion and sandy-coloured hair, an expression of perfect coolness, but the most determined resolution in his eye, and manifestly capable of attempting most things which strength and activity can accomplish. It appeared, moreover, to Amos, that his accent was not Kentish. It was broader, fuller, and, in the pronunciation of certain words, more un-

couth, than the middling classes are accustomed to use in Kent; and it was totally free from Cockneyisms. Without taking any notice of the stranger's civility, therefore, further than by thanking him for it, Amos at once taxed him with being the native of a different county.

"You are quite right," answered the stranger; "I have not the honour to be a Kentish man—or, I beg your pardon, a man of Kent—for that, I presume, is the designation here. But I have spent a considerable portion of my life in the county; and I must say, that he is very hard to please who would not be content to pass his life there."

"Are you in business?"

"I can hardly say either that I am or am not," replied the stranger. "A settled business, such as you own, for example, I certainly do not follow; but I do not object to undertake a job if it come in my way, and happen to suit my fancy."

"And in what line, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"Oh, hang it! I am not particular. Any little odd or end; but if I had a choice, I should certainly prefer the trade that is freest from trammels."

"It would be a hard matter to determine that point," replied Amos, coolly. "All kinds of business are, now-a-days, so trammelled—or rather, so burthened with expenses and restrictions, that to choose among them one from which to get a fair profit will puzzle you, I take it, or any other man besides. To be sure, I cannot answer for more than agriculture; but if you can live at all, I advise you not to burn your fingers by trying that."

"I don't know," answered the stranger. "Your agriculturist seems to me to have a pretty good command of his own time, at all events; and if a man have time, with ever so small a share of wit, the deuce is in it if he can't find ways and means to improve it. I dare say that you, now, don't confine your attention exclusively to agriculture?"

"I should like to know what a man like me could turn his hand to, apart from the business in which he was brought up?"

"Nay, that I cannot speak for. All that I meant to insinuate was, that a person of your sharpness must either find his farming business answer, or he will look about for some second string wherewith to furnish his bow and shoot an arrow."

"And may I venture to ask," demanded

Amos, " how your companion, the silent gentleman there, employs himself?"

" He 's my partner," answered the stranger, laughing. " He 's like Tom in the play; when the master calls ' John, John, what are you doing?' and John says, ' Nothing;'—and then comes ' Tom, Tom, what are you about?' ' Helping John, sir.' "

" I hope *you* find *your* business profitable, gentlemen," said Amos, becoming, he scarce knew why, both uneasy and irritable. " If a command of time and a little wit be all that men need to make their fortunes, you seem to have plenty of the first at your disposal, with a fair share of the last."

" Well, here comes dinner," said the stranger, as the waiter entered with a smoking joint of mutton; " and if your appetite be like mine, the thought of much business or little, or great profits or small, will not interfere with the discussion of that. Shall I help you?"

The three casual acquaintances soon satisfied one another that, whatever might be their differences of opinion on other matters, they were equally agreed to lay in a good stock both of solids and liquids. It was marvellous to behold how they kept pace with one another; the trencher of each returning for a fresh supply as

soon as that of his companion was loaded; while a bottle of sherry, together with sundry pints of brown stout, disappeared with incredible rapidity. Then followed the tass of brandy with which, on such occasions and in such company, the meal is usually completed.

"This tastes of the right sort," observed the stranger, permitting the liquor to pass slowly over his tongue: "this never paid the King's duty, or I much mistake. It has the true salt-water smack; it does one's heart good."

"I am not skilled in these matters," said Amos; "but to my taste it very much resembles what you may purchase any day at the store of every dealer in London or Canterbury."

"Well, devil take me!" continued the stranger, "if I understand how men can be so foolish as pay a duty of two hundred per cent. when they can get an article so much better without. For my part, I hate all restrictions on trade so cordially, that, upon principle, I would always patronise the smuggler, if I knew where to find him, even if I ran some risks in doing so."

"You are bold in language before a stranger, friend," observed Amos, not in the slightest degree tempted to adopt the same tone. "What-

ever I thought, I should be more cautious, were I in your place, how I spoke; unless, indeed, it be with you as with many more, who speak without acting."

The stranger cast a quick but piercing glance towards Amos, and their eyes fairly met for the first time since their acquaintance began. Both were resolute men, and each saw that the other, whatever he might think, was not likely to betray himself unnecessarily, either by word or gesture. The stranger, therefore, permitted his features to relax into a smile, while he commended the prudence of his companion, and made light of the opposite quality in himself. It seemed, however, as if he were again in a hurry; for without waiting for the bottle of port which they had talked of discussing after the cloth was withdrawn, he observed to his partner, that time wore apace, and that they must endeavour to make up for the blunder of the morning by getting on a stage in the right way before dark. "You, I suppose," continued he, addressing himself to Amos, "mean to adhere to your determination of visiting your friends in the Marsh: as there is no market here, indeed you could not do better."

"That I must determine for myself," replied

Amos, coldly: "these are monstrous snug quarters, and the gathering clouds seem to indicate that it will be prudent to keep under cover when one has found it."

"Ah, well, you will of course do as you see best; but we must go."

The stranger here having desired the bill to be brought in, paid two-thirds of the reckoning, and immediately quitted the room; and, by the clank of horses' hoofs ringing in the paved court-yard, Amos soon ascertained that he was gone.

"Now, hang me if I know what to make of that fellow!" said he. "That he is not what he would have me believe, is quite certain; for he has no mark of your genuine free-trader about him; neither can I swallow the notion that he is moving about for his own amusement. And what brought him here? There is a mystery in the case which, if I had more time at my command, I should like exceedingly to solve. However, that is quite out of the question: I have work enough to do of my own, and it is high time to set about it."

So saying, he rose, and having discharged his reckoning, ordered his horse. The noble animal was brought round accordingly; but just as Amos was preparing to mount, the

hostler gave him notice that the horse had cast a shoe.

"That's impossible!" said Amos; "he was shod only two days ago, and the road I passed was so rough, that if he had gone barefoot even for twenty yards, I must have felt it."

"I can't tell nought about that, sir," replied the man; "but the shoe of his near fore foot is gone, I am quite certain."

Amos looked, and the case was as the hostler had described. The appearance of the hoof, likewise, plainly denoted that it could not have been bare any length of time, nor yet come much in contact with the hard soil since its covering was lost.

"This is one of the strangest occurrences that ever befel me," said he aloud; "but it can't be helped now. You have a smith close at hand, I suppose?—take the beast to the forge, and get him shod without delay: and mark me,—cause the smith to examine the rest of the feet minutely, that I may not find myself run aground again at a moment when I fancied myself in deep water."

The man obeyed, while Amos, returning to his little parlour, did his best to amuse an anxiety which stole upon him he knew not how, by ordering a glass of warm punch, which

was consumed, together with a second, ere the farrier had completed his operations. As soon, however, as the horse was brought round, he mounted, and in five minutes was beyond the town, and traversing the narrow causeway that leads towards Romney Marsh.

The clock struck three as Amos guided his horse's head round the corner of the Royal Oak; he had thus little more than a single hour of daylight before him, and he knew that the leaders of his company were to assemble at the Swan as soon after dark as possible. This was not, therefore, a time for sparing Rattler, however willing he might be to carry him in fresh for the night; so he shook the noble animal's bridle, and he bounded along again as if he were just loosened from his own stall. Rapidly, therefore, the town faded into distance; the meadows that girdle in the town were traversed; the bridge was passed, and left behind; and the wild woody country that skirts the edge of the Marsh was entered. Amos arrived, indeed, within a couple of miles of Warehorn, and had begun anxiously to consider the projected enterprise, when, amid the fading light, the figures of two horsemen became visible, jogging along at a leisurely pace in his front. At first he checked his own

horse, hoping that as there was not much of road to traverse, they might get so far ahead as to render his passing them unnecessary; but a moment's consideration showed him that nothing could come of that scheme. He accordingly pushed on again, and in a few moments found himself close in their rear. They separated to the right and left, looking back at the same time.

"Well overtaken again, fellow traveller," said the same stranger who had annoyed him with his company at the Wheel and the Saracen's Head: "this is a piece of good luck which we had no right to anticipate. We are zig-zag sort of voyagers, you see; but since our eccentric movements bring us into such excellent company, I don't think it would be civil to complain of them. You mean to halt for the night at Warehorn, I presume?"

"I don't suppose it can matter much to you where I halt for the night," replied Amos, thrown completely off his guard by the feelings of anger and suspicion which this unexpected meeting called into play. "As far as my tastes are concerned, we had enough of one another's company for one day, at all events; so, if it be all the same to you, I would as soon we rode separate."

"Nay, nay, friend," answered the stranger, keeping his horse at the same pace with that of Amos; "I do think that, in a wild country like this, company cannot fail of being agreeable to all honest men. For my part, being entirely at a loss where to put up, I will feel exceedingly indebted to you if you will direct me."

"Put up under that ditch, or in it!" answered Amos fiercely, reining in his horse, and making him stand stock still. "You seem to have been dogging me all day long, for what purpose I know not; but curse me if I bear with impertinent curiosity from you or any man! What do you want?"

"Nothing in the world, my good friend," replied the other with the most provoking coolness, "except good company. But, if you don't choose to give us that, of course we can't help it. I wish you good-night."

The strangers rode forward as the speaker uttered these words; and Amos, who pursued his journey at a foot's pace, soon lost the sound of their horses' hoofs. He then resumed his trot, and in half an hour had arrived at the Swan at Ham-street.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RESULT OF NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

"Has anybody arrived yet, Joe?" said he to the man who took his horse.

"Only two strange gentlemen," replied the hostler, "that came just before yourself, sir."

"The devil! And what have you done with them?"

"Their beasts are in the stable; they themselves in the little parlour, where they have ordered supper in two hours' time."

"I wish to G— you had told them there was no room. How could you be so thoughtless, Joe? You knew I was coming here to-night; and there, you have given them the only room in which it was possible for me to transact my business."

"It wasn't I that took them in: but if it had been, they were so pressing that I couldn't have refused them. They would take no denial."

"And what 's to be done now? Is anybody else here?"

"Bill Blowhard and Jack Castaway was here, sir; but they 're gone out. They said they would be back again, however, in an hour, and it 's nearly gone now."

"Well, then, be sure you give me warning when they come; and look ye, Joe, let 's have the stable clear, at all events. I suppose I must put up with the tap in the mean while."

Amos turned away as he said this, and made for the house; but his tormentors seemed resolute in defeating his plans as soon as he had formed them. He was scarcely within the door of the public-house, when his talkative friend met him, and, without appearing to recollect that they had differed in opinion by the way, addressed him in the same easy tone which he had assumed throughout.

"This is indeed being more fortunate than we had any right to expect," said he. "I understood that you were going to visit a friend in the Marsh; but your horse, I suppose, was knocked up, or you found yourself later than you expected to be? However, we are the gainers, at all events; for there seems to be but one parlour in the house, and of course

you will join us at supper, as you did at breakfast and dinner?"

"Friend," said Amos, coldly but firmly, "there are certain bounds beyond which civility cannot go without becoming impertinence. Chance threw us together only a few hours since, and I have no particular inclination to patch up an intimacy on such short notice. So, with your leave, I had rather sup by myself, let me get it where I may."

"We will meet after supper then," said the stranger.

"No; neither shall we meet after supper."

"Ah, but we will though," said the other gaily, as he passed on, and walked out into the village.

"Now the devil take your assurance!" muttered Amos to himself, as he entered the tap-room, in a corner of which next the fire he sat down. But he had not long kept his station there, ere the hostler called him, and he sallied forth, ostensibly for the purpose of seeing his horse fed.

Amos followed the man towards the stable, beside which he could perceive, through the gloom, the outlines of two men. They answered his private signal; so, taking the dark lantern from Joe's hand, he approached,

and the three entered the stable together. The conference was brief, but very much to the purpose. Amos ascertained that the party was within call; that the workers amounted to forty-five, the fighters to eighteen: of these latter, twelve carried fowling-pieces, the rest were batsmen; and the whole, as his informants assured him, could be relied upon under any circumstances. Considering the reported value of the cargo to be run, and the necessity under which they were laid of running it at all hazard, Amos could not but think that the numbers of armed men at his disposal were small. Still, as he had not as yet encountered any opposition except such as management and address sufficed to overcome, he was far from distrusting the result. He directed the constables to draw their people to a head at the Pair of Compasses, where they had more than once assembled already; and promising to join them there within two hours, he returned to the tap-room.

If Amos expected to undergo any further annoyance from the strangers, he was altogether deceived. For the full space of an hour, during which he occupied his seat by the fireside, they never came near him; and, strange to say, in exact proportion as they

appeared desirous of keeping aloof, his curiosity with respect to them received an impulse. He rang the bell, and demanded of the landlady what her strange guests were about.

"They walked out about an hour ago," said she, "and have not yet returned."

"But you expect them back?" said he.

"They ordered beds, sir," replied the hostess.

"Oh, very well—no matter; I must go out also for a while: but I will be back again in half an hour's time at the farthest; and should they return before I do, I will thank you to tell them so."

The landlady promised to do as she was bid; while Amos, passing quietly to the stable, began to saddle his horse.

"D—n me if I know what these sharks are up to," said the hostler, who joined him during the operation; "but they are gone, horses and all. I advise you to look out for squalls, if, as I suppose, you be up to trap to-night."

"By heavens! I have suspected as much for some time," said Amos. "Which way did the rascals go? And yet I can't think that, neither, unless there be some snake in the grass. I say," continued he, after a brief pause, "have you

anything that 's good for close quarters? I never like to make a noise if I can help it, and should prefer one of your cut-and-come-again's, if I could get it."

"You shan't want for that," replied the hostler: "there 's the sword master used to wear in the yeomanry thirty years ago; it 's a monstrous good blade still, though the sheath be somewhat rusty;—shall I fetch it?"

Amos assented; and the weapon being brought, he drew it from its soiled scabbard, and saw that the edge was still keen, and the point fit for warlike purposes. It happened, moreover, that the belt was also within reach; so that, buckling on the whole affair, and concealing it within his coat, he felt, or fancied, that he was prepared for any emergency. Rattler was then led forth, free of limb and sound in wind as if he had just quitted his own stable, albeit the distance he had that day travelled could not fall short of five-and-forty miles. But Rattler was one of those noble quadrupeds whose powers of endurance seem to increase with the necessities that call for them, and which, whether distressed or not, will persevere in their work till they fairly break down under it. "Carry me well through this last affair, my boy," said Amos, as he

patted the animal's neck, "and you shall have corn and rest to your heart's content;" and again the brute answered by tossing his head triumphantly in the air and stepping forward.

As he pursued his solitary way through the dull and monotonous flat of the Marsh, Amos looked anxiously about him, partly in order to ascertain whether he were the sole traveller abroad, partly because he was anxious about the night, of which the appearance had become of late threatening. The clear blue which had over-canopied him as he gazed from the top of the Downs was now obscured with clouds; while the wind, moaning from time to time in short sharp gusts, indicated exactly the sort of weather of which the seaman is apt to say that he don't know in what it will end. Occasionally, also, a few drops of rain drove into his face, indicating, as he looked towards the sea, that the breeze, be it stiff or gentle, bore on shore, and, a necessary consequence, was favourable for any vessel whose course lay from the opposite coast. The knowledge of that fact caused Amos to quicken his pace. Rattler threw out his legs nobly, and in a remarkably short space of time the light which he had ordered to be displayed in an upper window of the Com-

passes became visible. All was then plain sailing. He rode up and found his men assembled, ordered silence in a tone which sufficiently indicated his determination to be obeyed, and desiring a trusty person to lead Rattler to a given point, dismounted, and placed himself on foot at the head of the gang.

Nothing could be more orderly than the advance of that body of smugglers towards the sea; silence was preserved as perfect as ever was preserved by the rear-guard of a retreating army; and each man knowing his own place, kept to it with a regularity which discipline alone can ensure. Not long did their route carry them along the high-road; striking into the meadows, they passed the broad, deep ditches that divide them one from the other, by bridges composed of single narrow planks, to discover which in open day would be no easy matter for persons partially acquainted with the localities. And to see with what skill they performed that manœuvre! how the files broke into rank entire, and then halted, after the column had crossed, in order that the line of march might be formed anew! No wonder that Amos should have felt proud when he looked back upon the band of determined men of which he was the leader. But these natural

impediments were at length surmounted, and the beach lay before them. It was wide and irregular in its surface—flat here, broken into hill and dale there; affording, by such means, excellent cover for ambuscades; and never had people traversed it who knew better how to turn to account the advantages which it offered. Winding round the bases of these miniature mountains of shingle, Amos led his people to a position where, being within a hundred and fifty yards of high-water mark, they could lie down in comparative security; and there, by a whisper which passed from file to file with the utmost caution, they received orders to halt.

If the discipline of the gang during the advance thus far deserved unqualified commendation, their behaviour during the tedious hour throughout which they waited for the signal of action was not less admirable. Their chief had indeed taken care, during his conference with the constables, to give his instructions so that they could not be mistaken: the exact spot for the decoy-light was specified, and every other arrangement made which the circumstances of the case seemed to require. But neither skill in the leader, nor discipline among those that follow, is sufficient to control wind and tide, both of which, in such operations as that now in pro-

cess of accomplishment, are very important agents. Still, nothing could exceed the patience of all engaged, among whom not a murmur was heard, notwithstanding that the night grew more threatening as it wore apace, and wind and rain equally beat upon them.

"What can be the occasion of all this delay?" whispered one of the constables to Amos: "it is close upon midnight."

Amos was going to answer; but ere the first word could escape his lips, a blue light was burned at sea, and the signal passed quietly from rank to rank to look out.

The blue light flickered, wavered, streamed up, and expired. In an instant a flash from the point indicated by Amos to his signal-man answered it, and for a quarter of an hour all remained quiet. Meanwhile the gale, having freshened considerably, caused the sea to break with considerable violence on the beach, and the roar of waters became every instant more and more alarming.

"'Tis an unlucky night," whispered one of his lieutenants to Amos; "I wish they may be able to get over the surf!"

"They must try, anyhow," replied the captain; "and the sooner they do so now the better. Up with the rockets there!"

Whiz, whiz, went a couple of sky-rockets, at the interval of perhaps a second from one another; and whiz, whiz, went those from the boat in reply.

"She has drifted, by heavens!" exclaimed several voices at once; "she has gone to leeward terribly, and is now well opposite the decoy!"

"No matter, lads," cried Amos aloud; "now's your time—you haven't a moment to lose!"

Up sprang the company, with ropes, hooks, and all sorts of implements ready in their hands, and rushed forward. As they hurried along the shore, the outline of a lugger became every instant more perceptible, bounding over the water with the speed of a racehorse. Now she rode upon the dark deep sea; now she rose upon the crest of a wave; now she was among the breakers; and now, with a fierce hissing noise, her keel seemed to scrape the shingle—she reeled, rocked, bent forward, was uplifted again upon a mass of breakers, and sprang high upon the beach. Still she was within water-mark; for the spray broke over her gunwale in every direction, and her stern appeared with difficulty to resist the pressure of the tide. But neither Amos nor his men paused to watch the result:

in three minutes the fighters were scattered in skirmishing order along two lines, in the interval between which the workers made ready to ply their tasks, the foremost penetrating without hesitation up to their waists in the spray, and holding on by the edges of the lugger, to hinder themselves from being borne out to sea.

"Now, my boys, now," cried Amos, "give way—give way, or the cursed blockaders will be upon us, and we may lose all!"

Amos threw out this inducement to increased vigilance not without cause. Scarcely was the vessel grounded, ere flash went a pistol about a hundred yards from the scene of action; and well were those who saw it aware that it would soon draw thither ample reinforcements. The exertions of the smugglers were therefore more than human; but they availed not: before half the cargo had been run, the dark figures of men were seen hastening towards them, and a voice almost immediately called upon them in the King's name to surrender.

"Stand off, and be d—d!" answered Amos, "or take the consequence."

But the Coast-guard did not stand off; on the contrary, they continued to advance, and Amos gave the word "Fire!" Six guns were immediately discharged, and one of the Coast-

guard dropped. But his companions, instead of being intimidated, seemed only to have their fury increased by the event; they answered the fire with a volley of carbines, and rushed on to close quarters.

The Coast-blockade amounted in all to only eight persons; but they were well armed, led on by gallant officers, and knew that the law was on their side. The smugglers outnumbered them five to one; yet the consciousness that they fought with a halter round their necks seemed to unman them, and their very multitude caused confusion. Amos alone seemed cool and collected: he took no direct part in the fray—that is, he neither discharged a pistol nor struck a sword-stroke, but animating the combatants from time to time, directed his chief attention to the workers. These sedulously plied their tasks during the whole of the skirmish, and had carried off a larger portion of the goods, when a second body of the Coast-blockade falling upon them from the rear, threw all into the utmost dismay. Both fighters and workers now broke and fled. It was to no purpose that Amos, by voice and gesture, strove to detain them; they either heard him not, or hearing, paid no regard to him; and when, casting aside his great-coat, he

ran among the press, and seizing one after another by the collar, commanded them to rally, they extricated themselves from his grasp and ran the faster. A panic had fallen upon the whole gang. They threw from them bales of goods, casks, boxes—everything that threatened in any way to incommode them in their flight, and, without so much as pausing to ascertain by what amount of force they were followed, plunged into the Marshes and dispersed.

Maddened with rage, disappointment, and vexation, Amos heaped upon his recreant band every epithet of reproach or scorn to which his lips could give utterance. His next consideration was how to dispose of himself; for by this time he stood literally alone against a host of enemies. Brave he unquestionably was, but not insane; and so, perceiving how vain resistance would be, he likewise passed the first plank, and made for the Marshes. His pursuers, however, were at his heels. It seemed also as if they had been acquainted with the situation of that bridge, at all events; for before he had traversed half the meadow that lay beyond, they were close in his track. Forward he ran, therefore, with redoubled speed, expecting every moment to be saluted with a volley of musketry; but none came.

He reached the second ditch, which was both deep and wide, but reached it where no plank spanned it. He dashed to his right, fancying that he saw the heap of rushes beneath which it lay; but his memory had failed him. No bridge was there; while every instant the pursuers gained upon him, till their very footsteps on the turf caught his ear.

"Surrender, you miscreant!" shouted a voice of which, even in his present perilous situation, he thought that the tones were familiar to him. But he did not surrender. Another rush to the right—then a few paces backwards—then a race to the front, and a desperate leap carried him clear to the opposite side. Bang, bang, went a couple of carbines on the instant, the balls from which whistled past his ear; but he sustained no wound, while the same voice, in a clear and a sonorous accent, prohibited a repetition of the fire. Amos, fancying himself comparatively safe, looked back: he saw some single object carried rapidly through the air, and was not long left in doubt as to the cause of the phenomenon;—a solitary enemy had cleared the ditch by the same process that he had followed, and now sprang towards him.

Amos was very brave; yet, hunted as he had been like a beast of prey, and alive to the dis-

advantages of his present situation, he would have willingly avoided another struggle, into which his pursuer seemed eager to force him. He continued his flight, therefore; but had compassed but a small space ere he discovered that the individual behind far surpassed him in speed of foot. His steps became more and more audible every instant—now his very breath was heard—and now a hand laid roughly on his shoulder convinced him that escape by flight was impossible. He shook off his adversary's grasp, and facing about, drew his sword and prepared to defend himself. The other hung back for an instant.

"I told you we should meet after supper," said he, in a tone which there was no possibility of mistaking; "and now I advise you to lay down your arms, and take your chance of mercy; for a prisoner you shall be this night, with a whole skin or a broken, just as you yourself may prefer."

"Is it you, most insolent?" cried Amos. "Thank God, I have you at last in the very situation which of all others I most longed for! You shall not force your company again on those that don't desire it."

"Do you see how easily I might settle this matter if I chose?" replied the stranger, pre-

senting a pistol at Amos as he was about to spring upon him. "But it is not your life I want—it is your person. So there, we are on equal terms, at all events."

As he said this, the officer threw his pistol on the ground and unsheathed a broadsword. It was dark, yet not so pitchy as to hinder each from observing the flash of the other's weapon as they closed in deadly and desperate strife. Both were strong, both active, both full of courage: youth and address were, however, on the side of the stranger, and they prevailed. After exchanging several cuts and thrusts without effect, the sword of his adversary passed through Amos's body, and he fell to the ground,

CHAPTER VIII

"Good night to Marmion."

"You have settled my business, whoever you may be," exclaimed the wounded man: "I'm done for, that's certain."

"I hope not," answered the stranger; "I hope that job is reserved for the hangman yet."

"Why are you so inveterate against me?" said Amos, while the blood trickled from his side and he laboured for breath. "What injury have I ever done to you, that you should thus taunt me in the very act of dying?"

"You, or your cursed gang, have killed a man to-night, to save the little finger of whose left hand, all your souls and bodies had been cheaply given. However, you shan't lie and bleed to death there."

The stranger ran back on concluding this sentence, leaving Amos alone, with the wretched conviction strong upon his mind that his

very hours were numbered, and so weakened already with the loss of blood that he retained his consciousness not without an exertion. He raised himself upon his elbow, and strove with his pocket-handkerchief to stanch the wound: but the exertion proved too much for him, and he fell back. Such was his condition when the Coast-guard, having discovered the plank-bridge, came up. They tore open his waistcoat, bound a handkerchief tight round his body, and making a sort of litter of one of their great-coats, laid him upon it, and in obedience to the orders of Amos's conqueror, who now put on his rightful character of an officer in the navy, conveyed him back to the Compasses. There he was almost immediately attended by the surgeon of the station, who dressed his wound, but who gave no hopes whatever of his surviving many days—if indeed he should live to see the morrow.

The remainder of that night was, as may be imagined, miserable enough to Amos. The surgeon had not, it is true, announced to himself that his recovery was hopeless; and the people who attended him were, upon the whole, as kind as under similar circumstances English men and women are apt to be. But when

the dread fiat has gone forth, there is usually a conviction on the mind which no exercise of reason, or even of hope, can blot out. Amos never expected to recover from the instant that he received his wound, and his thoughts ran continually upon what was to follow. The condition of his family preyed upon him; the memory of the strange fit of despondency to which he had been subjected previously to quitting Waltham came back upon him: he became excited, feverish, almost delirious, and utterly indifferent to what passed around him.

"Send for Charlotte, I pray you," said he to the woman who watched by his bedside: "let me see her once more before I die; her sweet voice will comfort me even here; and I have much, much to say to her."

"Who is Charlotte?" asked the female; "and where does she live?"

"Who is she!" demanded Amos: "my daughter, to be sure—my beloved child. Tell some one to ride express and fetch her: Rattler will carry him in no time at all."

"Ride where?" demanded the woman again.

"To Waltham, to Waltham!" answered the wounded man; "and for God's sake lose no

time about it. My sands are running out fast; and I cannot close my eyes till they have looked upon her sweet face at least once again."

"Let the unfortunate man's wishes be attended to," said the stranger to whom Amos owed his overthrow, and who had entered the apartment to inquire after him as he thus opened his mind to the nurse. The woman hastened to give the necessary orders; while the visiter, approaching the bed, sat down beside it, and gazed, not without pity, bordering almost on remorse, upon its occupant.

"Who are you?" asked Amos in a feeble voice. "Ah! I see now, my enemy, my personal enemy. Well, I forgive you, at all events: yet, I never did you wrong, and scarcely deserved to have my life taken by your hand. How came you to dodge me as you did,—what was your particular spite against me?"

"None, friend, none, I assure you," answered the other. "I dodged you as a mere matter of duty; and as a matter of duty would have made you my prisoner, had you chosen to surrender. I bore you no ill will,—I had no cause to bear it. I never saw you till we met at the Wheel on Barham Downs."

"And how came we to meet there?" demanded Amos eagerly.

"Oh, for the matter of that, you must ask some of your associates. All that I know about the matter is, that I received instructions to repair to the Wheel at an early hour yesterday morning; to watch the arrival of a person answering your description; to ascertain whither he was bound; to follow, or go before him, stage by stage; and, last of all, to have a force ready between Dungeness and No. 8 battery, sufficient to meet and overcome a gang of smugglers, acting under the guidance of resolute leaders. You know how I performed my part in the drama: had you abstained from offering a resistance which was useless, or been less unfortunate than to kill my companion by your fire, you might have escaped; but seeing that gallant youth fall, I swore to avenge him, and I kept my vow."

"Betrayed by our own people," muttered Amos faintly: "who could the traitor be?"

"One who has repeatedly communicated information to us before, and who receives a regular pension from the Custom-house for doing so. But, of course, you scarcely expect that I should tell you more."

"Well, then, leave me, friend," replied Amos. "I would fain sleep if I could: at all events, I desire to be alone."

The officer withdrew as the sick man requested, and his place was forthwith supplied by the nurse. She sat down at a distance from the bed, and drawing the curtains close, strove to cast her patient into the shade: but her care availed nothing. He tossed about, feverish and miserable; repeatedly called upon her to give him drink, and demanded on each occasion to be informed whether Charlotte had been sent for, and how long it might be ere she could arrive. Thus the hours of darkness stole on, wretchedly enough for Amos, and far from agreeably to the person who waited upon him: neither did the return of light bring with it any other relief to him than that which the mind ill at ease with itself generally receives from the knowledge that the whole world is astir, and that time for deep or continued thought is not to be expected.

The day wore on, and often and often, when the clock struck, or some other incident brought the passage of time conspicuously under his observation, Amos, though becoming rapidly weaker every moment, renewed his inquiries as to the coming of his daughter. Twilight, indeed, had begun to gather round his bed ere any intelligence reached him; and the heavy eye and

the labouring breath denoted the closing scene, when a noise of carriage-wheels moving with great velocity along the road caught his ear. The eyelid, which had wellnigh shut up the orb for ever, rose as if instinctively; his breathing became regular, he even raised his head from the pillow; and when the carriage stopped, and the sound of footsteps on the stair reached him, he made an effort to sit up. Thus it was with him when the chamber-door flew open, and Charlotte rushed to the bed-side.

"My daughter, my daughter!—thank God, thank God!" exclaimed the unhappy man, falling into her embrace, and becoming instantly speechless.

"My father!" shrieked the agonized girl—"my father! is it thus we meet! Oh, it was not then for nothing that the shadows of that terrible night came over you. Speak to me—look upon me—it is I, Charlotte, your own Charlotte! Oh, speak to me! speak to me, my father, or I will die at your bed-side!"

"Bless thee, bless thee, my child!" cried her father, somewhat recovered. "Oh I had much, much to say; but my strength fails me fearfully, rapidly.—Woman!" cried he to the nurse, gasping all the while, "give me wine,—

I want something to support me,—I want the spark kept in only for a few moments;—Wine, I say, wine,—give me wine!"

The nurse obeyed. She poured out a large glassful of wine, and gave it to him; and he drank with avidity, and was revived. He then besought her to aid him in sitting up; and when he had attained to that attitude, to support him with pillows; after which he desired to be left alone with his daughter. Of course he was immediately obeyed.

"Charlotte," said he, as soon as the door closed upon them, "my hours are numbered: I cannot live,—and to die, oh, my God! the thought is terrible. I besought you to pray for me:—have you done so?"

"No, papa, I have not," replied his daughter; "you afterwards forbade me to do so: but I will pray for you now;—I will pray that you may not die,—you shall not die."

"Do, oh do!" cried he wildly: "or stay;—desire the nurse to go for the minister of the parish; his prayers will avail, if prayers avail at all. And you, child, say, before he comes, what is the secret that has eaten into your vitals. Why have you been so dull of late? why are your looks so haggard even now?"

"Do not ask me, papa — do not ask me

now; it would but increase your misery.—Oh! you shall not die, you must not die!—you will recover, and then I will tell you all—all, no matter what the consequences may be either to me or to others."

"Charlotte," said Amos solemnly, "if you desire to see my life go out in peace, I adjure you to hide nothing from me now. If you wish to receive my last blessing, speak out—what has befallen?"

The unfortunate girl threw herself down on her knees, and buried her face in the bed-clothes: her whole frame shook with agony, and for several minutes she seemed incapable of any exertion. He repeated his demand in the same solemn tone, and she raised her head.

"Do not curse me, oh, my father—do not spurn me from you. I am a lost creature,—ruined, and utterly undone!"

"What!" cried the wounded man, excitement and horror giving him a fresh lease of strength—"retract these words, Charlotte!—tell me that I have misunderstood you,—relieve my mind from this horrid suspicion; or else say what fiend has robbed you of your innocence, and me of my peace for ever."

"Marshall is the author of my wrong and of my shame, which cannot long be hidden,"

said Charlotte, as she again bowed down her head and lay in mute agony along the foot of the bed. As to Amos, he was like a man utterly bewildered; he could not speak,—he seemed not to comprehend what had been uttered; he only gazed straight before him, as if there had been on the bed-curtain some characters inscribed from which the truth might be collected. Thus it was for several minutes with both of them; at the conclusion of which Amos, in a voice husky and broken, repeated his former question. The wretched girl looked up.

"It is too true, father—it is indeed too true; I am a guilty and fallen creature, who for weeks has longed to confess her transgression to you, and to throw herself on your forgiveness. But from day to day I have been held back by assurances on his part that all would yet be well, and that in his own character he would be in a condition to make me amends for the wrong that I have suffered. Ay, even on the night before you left us, I drew from him a confession that he is in reality a man of rank; and that so soon as you should have accomplished the delicate affair in which he employed you, he would be able to lay aside the mask.—But now, oh, my father! live—live

to forgive me and to avenge my wrongs, for I see that I am indeed betrayed and deserted."

"I will live, girl!" replied he fiercely: "I will live to avenge, whether I forgive you or not. Leave me for a few moments, however, and send the commander of the Coast-guard here. Oh, dupe, dupe, ten-fold dupe!—Did you hear what I said? Go quickly and do my message, or I shall not have strength to accomplish what I intend."

Charlotte obeyed; and Captain Colville, (so the officer was called,) making haste to obey the summons, was at the bed-side of his prisoner in a moment. The conference, which was earnest, and conducted on both sides with great eagerness, lasted about a quarter of an hour; at the close of which period the captain quitted the sick man's chamber, and hurrying down stairs, directed his horse to be saddled. He had mounted, and was setting out, when the clergyman of the parish arrived.

"There is one above much desires to see you," said he, "and, if I mistake not, stands sorely in need of advice. But he has asked for his daughter in the first place; where is she?"

Charlotte sprang forward and hurried up stairs. She found her father still labouring under the most painful excitement: his mind,

indeed, seemed so engrossed with projects of revenge on Marshall, that all thoughts of his own condition were banished from it; nor was it till she ventured to inform him of the presence of the clergyman below, that the sense even of bodily pain returned. When the excitement began to subside, however, the effect was remarkably striking. At first his manner was as fierce as ever; but by degrees anger itself wore gradually out, as the twilight fades shade by shade till it deepens into night.

"Who sent for a parson?" demanded he: "is this a time to play the hypocrite? Oh for four-and-twenty hours of the strength that I once had! Years, years of this degrading weakness would I endure, if these could but gain me one day such as I could lately reckon upon —one day for revenge! But it will not do; my limbs are a burthen to me,—I cannot move them; I am as helpless as a baby.—Charlotte, is this you? Come near to me, my child—come near, that I may bless you. Have you prayed for me, Charlotte? Pray, pray,—I am weak—I am cold;—there is a film before my eyes—I cannot see. What is that? Pardon, pardon,—oh, my God! pardon, pardon!"

Charlotte gazed in her father's face: the features had become suddenly rigid; the eyes

were fixed, the lips moved, but no sounds followed. She sprang from her knees, on which she had cast herself, ran to the landing-place, and called aloud for the minister. He hurried up stairs, and following the agitated girl, knelt down, as she did, at the bedside. Earnest and deep was the good man's prayer in behalf of one who never prayed for himself; and for a brief space it seemed as if the patient understood him. But the symptoms of consciousness which at first he had exhibited, became gradually less and less manifest, and then ceased altogether. The hand which grasped that of Charlotte lost its tension; the laboured breathing was heard no more; the head rolled to one side, the jaw fell, the lamp of life had gone out.

"God's will be done!" said the curate; "and you, poor girl, must submit to it."

But he spoke to one who heard him not. Charlotte had fallen forward upon the bed, and lay as insensible to all external objects as the corpse beside which she had lately been kneeling.

CHAPTER IX.

EFFECTS OF CAUSES.

When Charlotte awoke from that long and fearful trance, there came in upon her a full consciousness of her forlorn condition, so sad, so humiliating, so overwhelming, that to close her eyes again with the assurance that she should never open them more, would have been to her the most satisfactory mandate that could have been uttered. The only being in life whom she looked to with affection and something like respect had left her. True, her mother lived, and, as far as her capabilities extended, she had hitherto proved herself an affectionate mother; but independently of the worse than equivocal nature of her position, she was destitute of education, and little, if at all, endowed with feeling, in the sense which Charlotte was accustomed to apply to the term. Moreover, the unfortunate girl's personal situation was the most distressing which it is possible for the imagination to conceive. Certain, if her life should

be prolonged, of becoming herself a mother, without the title which can alone hallow the tie, she saw herself on the brink of a precipice from which there seemed no retreating; for the events of the day on which her father quitted home had sufficed to set her right on more than one point concerning which she had heretofore been in error. It will be necessary to go back for a brief space to that eventful period of time, in order to place her actual position in its proper point of view.

When Charlotte rose in the morning, and found her father gone, she neither experienced nor expressed surprise. The conversation which she had had with Marshall over-night prepared her for such an occurrence; and if her father's manner just before they parted occasioned a feeling of anxiety, it would be too much to say that it amounted to positive uneasiness. She knew that he was going to undertake some business peculiarly delicate and important; and she had read enough to come to the conclusion, that men entrusted with grave matters of state are always liable to fits of despondency. To her mother's inquiries, therefore, she replied cheerfully and confidently; assuring her that the absentee would return ere four-and-twenty hours passed

by, and that, in all probability, he would never be required to quit home in a similar manner again. It was not a hard task to lull to sleep the anxieties of a woman of the housekeeper's temperament; so, for an hour or two, things went on at Ware-farm much as they were accustomed to do on ordinary occasions. But towards noon, just as Charlotte was preparing to walk out, a little girl arrived with a note, which was put into her hands. It ran thus:—

"Circumstances have occurred, my beloved girl, which render it necessary for me to quit this place; at all events, for a time. Whether the cloud that at present lowers over my fortunes will ever be dispelled, I know not; but should it disperse, or even moderate in its character, no matter how slightly, you shall be made acquainted with the fact, and I be rendered happy in the renewal of an intimacy which has constituted my whole delight in obscurity. Alas! in linking your fate with one whose life must continue to be spent amid the turmoil and vexation of party, you have subjected your gentle nature to that which it was never designed to endure; and I, in taking advantage of your devoted attachment, have everything wherewith to reproach myself. But what are

we, after all, except creatures of destiny? It may be that we shall never meet again; and if so, be it your business to forget one who never can forget you. Still let us hope for better things. Meanwhile, farewell, dearest girl: may every happiness attend you, prays your own most devoted and attached,

"PAL
(This syllable partially erased)
"J. MARSHALL."

Charlotte read this epistle thrice over from beginning to end, before she could sufficiently command her reason to determine what it meant. The first perusal, indeed, inflicted upon her a blow which rendered sense, intellect, the faculty of comprehending, all of them dull; and the second and the third, so far from dispelling the haze, seemed only to increase its density. At last, however, judgment reasserted its supremacy, and a conviction that she was cruelly and utterly betrayed followed as a matter of course. Now, though in calamities of a minor nature, tears and lamentations, and sometimes hysterics, indicate the misery of the afflicted, such sorrow as that of which Charlotte was the victim is always mute. She laid aside her cloak and bonnet,

withdrew to her own apartment, sat down in a chair, and so continued, without moving limb or feature, for the space of a full hour.

From this waking trance she was at last roused by the entrance of her mother, who had seen her receive the note, watched its sad effect upon her, observed her retire, and becoming uneasy at so prolonged an absence, now broke in upon her solitude. Not by the opening of the door, however, was Charlotte attracted. On the contrary, her eyes were still fixed on vacancy, when her mother, advancing to the opposite end of the room, laid her hand upon her shoulder, and called her by her name. She started up like one affected by a shock of electricity, and in a hurried manner demanded to be informed what was the matter.

"Matter, child!" said her mother; "nay, it is I that must ask what is the matter. There you sit, like an enchanted creature, motionless in your chair; so that I enter your room, and jog your very elbow without being noticed; and then you jump up all at once and ask what is the matter?"

"I did not observe you, mother; I was not aware that you were near me. Are you ill? or has my father returned? or what is it?"

"Charlotte, *you* are ill," replied the house-

keeper; "you have been ill for some time; and the letter you received an hour ago has not made you better."

"What letter?—whence did it come? from whom did it come?" demanded Charlotte, speaking with extraordinary rapidity, while her cheeks grew deadly pale.

"That you ought to know better than I," answered her mother; "and yet I think that I ought not to be kept in the dark neither. Is it of your father that you have heard?"

"Oh, no, no, mother; I know nothing of my father; would that I did! But leave me for five minutes, only for five minutes; I am not quite myself; I shall be better then, and we can talk of it by-and-by."

"Of what, child, of what?"

"Oh, never mind, only leave me; I wish to be alone; I will join you in ten minutes, if you will but leave me."

The mother obeyed, not without some grumbling, with which were mixed up sundry allusions to the airs which some folks gave themselves, considering they were some folks' children. But Charlotte did not hear all this; and, if she had heard it, would not have noticed it. On the contrary, no sooner was her mother gone, than she arrayed herself once

more in her cloak and bonnet. This done, she passed quietly from the house by the back-door, and turning her face towards the village, hurried thither at a quick pace. She made at once for Marshall's shop. The shutters were up, the door was locked, there was not a symptom either about it, or the dwelling above, that a living soul lingered near the spot; indeed, it was not till after she had repeatedly knocked, so repeatedly as to attract the notice of more than one passer-by, that any notice was taken of her signal. At last the female who had acted as Marshall's housekeeper, thrust her head from an open window, and demanded in no very gentle tone the nature of her business.

"Where is Mr. Marshall?" asked Charlotte, in a faltering voice.

"How can I tell?" was the answer; "I only know that he is not here, nor has been since midnight; but as to where he may be, you must inquire elsewhere, if you want to discover."

Charlotte did not desire to learn more. Her miserable curiosity was satisfied: she returned home, passed quietly once more to her chamber, and went to bed. Neither of her mother nor of the apothecary, who was called in, would she take any notice. She answered no inquiries; she

uttered no complaint; but lay with her face to the wall, mute as one who possessed not the faculty of speech, and perfectly motionless.

While such was the condition of affairs at Ware-farm, the little world of Waltham laboured under a very high degree of excitement in consequence of the sudden disappearance of one of its most conspicuous public characters, in the person of Mr. Marshall the grocer.

At first, though his shop-windows continued closed long after the hour at which he was accustomed to open them, the passers-by took it for grated, either that he had been kept up late over-night by business, or else that raking and good company might possibly be in fault. But when nine, ten, eleven, and even twelve o'clock struck, and still the shutters retained their places, fears began to be entertained that some evil had overtaken him, and the propriety of investigating the matter was suggested. Not wishing, however, to take so much upon themselves, the neighbours called in the aid of the village aristocrats; who, comprehending Mr. Sankey, the curate, the apothecary, and finally the constable, gave directions that the mystery should be investigated without delay. Accordingly the door was assailed, at first gently, then the reverse of

gently, but without effect; and it became manifest to all concerned, either that the house must be empty, or that the inmates were dead. The next measure, therefore, was to break one of the windows of the wash-house, and force in the shutter. This done, the constable entered, the apothecary and curate following close in his train; and all three, bursting open a door that cut off their progress, entered the dwelling. They passed from room to room without discovering a human being, till they came at last to the garret in which the housekeeper slept. They entered it also, and found the woman lying across her bed, fully dressed, even to her shoes, and breathing heavily. Mr. Holtum immediately saw that she was labouring under the effects of a very powerful opiate: he hastened to administer the proper remedies; and, though long doubtful of the issue, was in the end gratified by perceiving that she exhibited signs of returning consciousness.

For some time after her senses were restored, the woman's recollection was hazy and indistinct; but by degrees light appeared to break in upon her. She stated, that on the previous night her master had been more than usually kind to her; that about eleven o'clock

a strange man came to the door, whom Mr. Marshall immediately admitted, and that they were in conference some time; and that after his departure, Mr. Marshall desired her to cook some pork chops for supper, inviting her at the same time to partake of them. The chops were cooked accordingly, and after they had been eaten, her master insisted upon her drinking a rummer of brandy punch, he himself pledging her in a tumbler of the same liquor; —in a word, they spent an exceedingly jolly night together. But scarcely were their potations finished, when the strange man came back, bringing in his train a whole posse of persons. Of what followed she had no further recollection than that she believed they began to pull things about in the strangest way possible, and to carry out by the back-door loads of articles of the existence of which she had not previously been aware. Meanwhile, however, her eyes closed, in spite of strenuous exertions to the contrary, and she saw no more till the gentlemen recalled her to her senses, in the manner which has just been described.

It is not necessary to make a short tale long. Marshall, either anticipating such a result to Amos's expedition as actually occurred, or instigated by some other motive equally

pressing, had made, on the night when he administered the sleeping potion to his housekeeper, what is called a moonlight flitting. His plans, moreover, being arranged with great address, suffered no check in their development. Having ample aid at hand, he not only succeeded in removing all that was really valuable within doors, but emptied the vault of its contents. With these, therefore, he was far on his way to a place of safety ere his associate had come into contact with the coast-blockade; and hence, when intelligence of the disaster got abroad, and its consequences began to appear, he was beyond their reach. And well was it for him that he had acted with so much forethought. The people of Waltham, though informed of Amos's fate, were yet perplexing themselves to account for the flight of Marshall, when Captain Colville, at the head of a small party of seamen and revenue officers, arrived in the village. They surrounded Marshall's house; they penetrated into his back kitchen; they raised the hearth, and displayed to the wondering eyes of a crowd of spectators the vault that lay beneath. But here their triumphs ended. The vault was empty; and he who had so long and so cunningly used it was gone, they knew not whither.

Such was the end of Mr. Amos, and such the result of the last scheme which he devised—a scheme of vengeance, the hope of accomplishing which gave him all the comfort that he enjoyed in his dying moments. His fate was worthy of one who, setting the known laws of God and man at defiance, makes an artificial point of honour the object of his worship; and holds it right to execute a purpose once determined on and expressed at the expense of any given amount of suffering either to himself or others. He received his death-wound while bravely supporting an unjust cause; and breathed almost his last sigh while arranging a method of crushing the man from whom he had received a mortal injury. As to his family, their fate was not different from what might have been expected. Having no legal claim upon any portion of the property which remained after the father's debts were paid, and being without a friend in the world to take pity upon them, his children—that is, such as were incapable of earning their own livelihood—came with their mother upon the parish; which measured out to them, as Amos had meted to the paupers of his own time, barely enough to supply those wants of which till now they had never known the pressure. With respect,

again, to Charlotte, her destiny was still more humiliating. In a room in the workhouse, so soon as her days were numbered, she gave birth to a son; for her mother, with inexplicable harshness, drove her in that dark hour to seek a shelter in the last asylum of poverty and shame; and many and bitter were the tears which she shed as she hung over the infant's cradle. But Charlotte had never learned to pray; her tears were not therefore tears of penitence, but of deep mortification—of mortification arising from the memory of station, character, respectability, comforts, lost for ever; and they consequently brought with them no medicaments for a lacerated spirit, no balm wherewith to bind up the heart that was broken. Charlotte clung to the workhouse, from the hour she entered it, with a pertinacity that surprised everybody: she never, indeed, quitted her room; but sat in one corner, nursing her child, as if there had not existed in the wide world a third human being. At last, however, it was announced to her by the parish officer, that she was not a fit object to continue as a permanent inmate of the building. She either could not or would not do the drudgery of the house, and no young person could be permitted to reside there without doing drudgery; she was there-

fore expected to return to her mother's, either carrying the infant along with her, and receiving the customary allowance for its keep, or leaving it to be cared for where it was born. Charlotte listened to these statements with dry eyes; she kissed the child frantically; handed it to the mistress of the house, and walked out. But she did not go to her mother's. On the contrary, when last seen by a person who recognised her, she was hurrying with rapid strides on the road to London, and she refused to answer or acknowledge the salutation with which she was greeted. Of course, there was a good deal of speculation as to what could have become of her, when morning and night succeeded each other without bringing her back; but speculation soon exhausted itself, and people contented themselves with saying, "It is a great pity; she was a sweet pretty girl, and if properly brought up might have made an excellent wife for some one: but what could be expected from such training? Nothing short of a miracle can make a female turn out well, who finds in her mother an example of unchastity, in her father a teacher of irreligion."

THE

OVERSEER'S DAUGHTER.

THE

OVERSEER'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

SCHEMES OF IMPROVEMENT.

The events described in the preceding narrative produced, as may be imagined, a great sensation in Waltham. The breaking up, under circumstances so peculiar, of Amos's fortunes, the death of Amos himself, the misconduct of his eldest daughter, and the utter ruin of all else connected with him, could not fail of operating with great force on the minds of such as heard the tale. It must be confessed, however, that the effect produced among the labouring classes was not happy. They regarded the misfortunes of the man as a judicial visitation of Providence on the harshness of the overseer; and instead of expressing themselves compassionately for a fellow mortal's sufferings, they seemed to rejoice in them. Nay more, if the

committee, by any chance, presumed to oppose itself to the demands, however unreasonable, of an applicant for relief, it was no unusual thing for the pauper to cast in the teeth of the objector Mr. Amos's destinies. Of course, this was never done without a warning being appended very much like to a threat: "You see what Amos got by being hard upon the poor: you had best take care, or else what happened to him may happen to you also."

How far the rate-payers were or were not operated upon by this species of argument, it would be hard to determine. Bring great calamities home to men's immediate neighbourhood, and it is astonishing how instrumental you may make them in guiding their decisions; for even those who affect to deride the principle of treating the accidents of life as moral lessons, cannot always avoid being taught by them. Be this, however, as it may, the consideration of past events operated, together with apprehensions for the future, to produce among the parishioners generally a cessation of party spirit. They combined to lament the encouragement that had been given to what all now denounced as seditious cabals among the labourers; while the profligate press was treated with a condemnation as hearty as the most bi-

goted admirer of the old times could have desired. Nay, the Blues themselves, forgetting, or seeming to forget, their political partialities, ceased to take in the Mercury, because it mixed up with political disquisition the grossest attacks on private character, — attacks of which these gentlemen could now calculate the justice, seeing that they and their personal friends were exposed to them.

During the continuance of this temporary calm, frequent meetings were held for the purpose of devising some well digested scheme, by which the people might be kept in constant employment, if not profitably, at all events without loss to their employers. The plan of the parish farm had clearly failed. To be sure, no one could pretend to say that it had received a fair trial; for whatever advantage individuals might have derived from it, to the parish at large it was a constant source of expense; still, there was a prejudice against continuing it, which few appeared either willing or able to combat. What then was to be done? In like manner the often-tried device of portioning out the surplus labourers among the occupiers, according to the amount of each man's occupation, might, it was said, answer well enough, provided you could ensure a strict

adherence to their pledges in all quarters. But the worst of it was, that people soon began to grow tired of a constant expenditure of money; and first one, and then another, quietly backed out of the arrangement. Thus the entire burthen was cast upon a few, who, however willing to do their parts, neither would nor could do more; and so the arrangement continually fell to pieces. That project, therefore, after a lengthened and warm discussion, was pronounced, like the other, inadmissible; and the question very naturally came to be asked again, what then shall we do?—It will be necessary before pursuing the subject further, to state who were the chief speakers in the debate.

Just before the breaking out of what will long be spoken of as "the agricultural disturbances," there had come to settle in the vicinity of Waltham one Mr. Jonathan Salvage, formerly superintendent and part proprietor of a stay-lace manufactory in Manchester, but now, having retired in good time from business, a gentleman, living on his means. Little ambitious of taking a lead among men whose habits and ideas ran in a totally different channel from his own, Mr. Salvage had hitherto kept aloof from parish meetings; paying his rates punctually as often

as the collector came round for them, but in no other respect interfering with the management or support of the poor. Like other men, however, who have spent the best part of their days amid the fetid and emasculatory atmosphere of a workshop, Mr. Salvage had his own ideas as to the purposes for which society existed. He did not, indeed, object to the process of ploughing and sowing the land, for he was a great bread-eater; and he approved of hop cultivation, because he loved beer: but in his view of such matters there was no picture so attractive to the eye of the philosopher and the patriot, as that which offered as its most conspicuous feature long rows of red brick buildings. "Once establish these," he would say, "and you will soon have the satisfaction to see how men can bring the powers of nature under their own control by their own contrivances;—how the wind and the fire are made to act in a furnace, so that metal itself runs out in a pure stream;—and how, by the application of steam, order and beauty come forth from confusion in the most unerring manner possible. And as to the moral effects of manufactures, under what circumstances are people so happy, and therefore so innocent, as when they are earning comforts not only for themselves, but for

others? Depend upon it, that to think of making a country like Great Britain, which abounds with coal, iron, and all useful minerals,—which can boast of a population robust, enlightened, intelligent, and enterprising—and which has everywhere water in abundance, — anything else than a manufacturing country, is to abuse the gifts which Nature has given you. Agriculture may be very well where land is abundant and the population scanty; but agriculture, in England, ought to be cried down as a separate interest,—its pursuits being reserved entirely for the amusement of those who have made their fortunes, as I have made mine, by other means."

If Mr. Salvage did not scruple to hold such language, or to broach such opinions, before the rioting began, he became still more confirmed in the justice of his theory afterwards. "You threw in my teeth," such was now his argument, "the sudden outbreaks to which a manufacturing population is liable. You reminded me of the tumults of 1818 in Manchester, as well as of the state of uneasiness and dread into which every check in disposing of their goods is sure to throw those who live by the shuttle. But what better is your own condition? Your pea-

santry, of whose loyalty and virtue we have heard so much, appear to be quite as ripe for mischief as our artisans; and if they don't carry things to the same extent, you may thank their want of intelligence, and not of good-will. Besides, can anything be more atrocious than the new system that has sprung up among them of incendiarism? No, no, gentlemen; it is quite clear to me, that nothing can keep your people quiet except profitable employment; and how you are to accomplish that without looking further than mere country labour, I confess that I am not witch enough to discover."

Such was the burthen of a speech of which, at the vestry-meeting just alluded to, Mr. Salvage delivered himself. It was interlarded, to be sure, with most of the pet phrases which political economists love to use,—such as, the exchange of labour for a subsistence paid out of capital—the fluctuating nature of the demand for labour,—the rise and fall of prices,—the profits of labour,—the growth of capital, with the Lord knows how many other flowers of rhetoric beside. But the point which alone seemed to be felt by the auditors, was that which bore upon the question immediately before them. Was it probable that, by esta-

blishing a manufactory in the parish, they would be able to relieve themselves from some of the burthens under which they groaned? And if they did, was it not certain that, to obtain a momentary relief, they would be laying the foundation of endless cares and annoyances hereafter. Among those who adopted this latter opinion, and maintained it with the greatest eagerness, Giles Solley was one. He admitted that, for the moment, the manufacturing project might answer; but he protested against the adoption of a measure, the inevitable result of which must be troubles and vexations by-and-by, to which those now considered intolerable would prove the merest trifles. Giles was surprised to find among the individuals whom the eloquence of Mr. Salvage had gained over some of the most influential occupiers in the parish; nevertheless, being pressed to bring forward some proposition of his own, he did not hesitate to do so.

"With respect," said he, "to Mr. Salvage's general argument, that it is unwise to treat agriculture in this country as a separate and a vitally important interest, I think that it will not be necessary to say much, with the view of satisfying this meeting that a more absurd theory never was broached. Not to say a

word of the habits and genius of a large proportion of the people, I ask him whether, in the history of the world, he has ever read of a state, not absolutely artificial in its very composition, that has attempted to apply the undivided energies of its population to commerce and manufactures. He may tell me of Genoa, and the Hanse Towns, and other petty republics, which the accidental advantages of local situation, and the state of the world at the time, puffed up for a brief space into hollow greatness; but if he can point to one nation half so populous or half so extensive as England, which has flourished even as long as Genoa flourished, without making agriculture walk hand in hand with commerce, then I will give up my case. However, as we have met here not to discuss abstract propositions, but to consider what may most conveniently be done in order to relieve the inhabitants of Waltham from some of the burthens under which they groan, I do think that both he and I would sadly misapply your time did we enter into any such controversy.

"I object to Mr. Salvage's proposal on several grounds. First,—I do think, notwithstanding all that has been advanced to the contrary, that the introduction of manufactures

into a district such as this, is not likely to make the people either more moral or more contented. Secondly,—the state of the districts already addicted to manufactures is not such as to encourage us in the idea of incurring similar hazards here. If any faith may be put in the common accounts of the day, our manufacturers are to the full as badly off as ourselves;—nay, it was but yesterday, so to speak, that we had a king's letter read in church, and a collection made afterwards, for the purpose of keeping those very men from starving whose mode of life we are recommended to imitate. Thirdly,—will Mr. Salvage have the goodness to describe to us the particular branch of manufacture which he fancies that a young and awkward establishment would be likely to carry on with profit, at a period when all the old and well-trained houses are complaining that they cannot so much as keep their own? Only consider the expenses which we must incur at the outset: we have buildings to erect; we have machinery to purchase; we have superintendents and foremen to hire at high salaries; we have workmen to form,—for surely Mr. Salvage himself will admit that the present race of labouring men could never be brought to use their hard and horny hands, except to spoil whatever job the

overseer might put them to. To what, then, may we look?—to some possible benefit to the next generation, to be purchased by the certain ruin of the present: for I need not say that we, who find it difficult to go on as we have hitherto done, would be still more put to it were new demands made upon us. I conceive, therefore, that the manufacturing notion is not to be entertained for a moment.

"But you will ask me, what then do I propose to do? Listen, and I will state my plan fairly, with the consequences which I have persuaded myself to believe would arise out of its adoption. All we who occupy farms of even moderate extent, and still more those whose holding is extensive, profess that the land will not pay for the expense of cultivation: why should not we spare a few acres each, in order to try what the poor can make of it? Say that the industrious labourer who is willing to take it shall be allowed to hire a plot of land, varying from one to two acres. He shall pay for it—to me, for example—precisely the same rent that I pay to the landlord, and shall be liable to his proportion of the burthens—such as tithe, poor-rates, and so forth—which the whole farm is bound to bear. In order to set him fairly afloat, I will undertake to supply him with seed for the

first year; but after that all expenses must be defrayed by himself, and he shall be at liberty to raise any description of crop that he chooses. If he accept my proposal, he shall undertake neither to come to the parish for relief under any circumstances, nor to expect more than four days' steady employment in each week. I very much mistake the characters of many of the men still, if they will not jump at such an offer, and thrive upon the system, if adopted. Only think, gentlemen, how much may be worked out of two acres of land, when a man, and perhaps two well-grown lads or boys, devote a large portion of their time to it! Besides, by giving the people this kind of assistance, you give them at the same time an interest in keeping down the rates, to which they equally with yourselves must contribute; and you hold out to them the strongest of all inducements to keep clear of the ale-house. Such is my proposal: and not to detain you longer, I shall only add, that if any gentleman will co-operate with me, I am ready to try the experiment to-morrow, and to stake on its result my own character for judgment in agricultural affairs."

Giles Solley was listened to throughout with an attention so marked, that at first he was

willing to construe the silence of his auditors into an acquiescence in his views; but in arriving at this conclusion he had only deceived himself. Neither the reports of others, nor their own personal experience, had yet convinced the tenantry of Waltham that a farmer is not always likely to succeed in proportion to the quantity of land that he uses. It was still with them a sort of axiom, that small farms must necessarily be unproductive; and the idea of subletting any portion of their respective holdings was derided.

What!" cried several voices at once, "would you convert your labourers into so many farmers? would you make little gentlemen of them? No, no. A garden, in which he may cultivate a few pot-herbs, and spend, if he be so disposed, his spare hours of a summer's afternoon, may be, and doubtless is, of great benefit to the labourer: but to let him have a couple of acres, and to expect that he shall ever pay his rent, the notion is ridiculous in the extreme."

It was to no purpose that Giles reminded the objectors that the experiment had actually been tried, and tried successfully, elsewhere. "They did not know what might be done in other counties, but in Kent they were sure it

would never answer." So that device shared the fate of all that had gone before it, and was rejected.

While the meeting thus listened to proposals only to reject and to condemn them, the evening wore apace, and already a motion was made to adjourn, without coming to any conclusion, when some one suggested a fresh scheme, of that temporising, or half-and-half kind, which men in difficulties are very apt to adopt, but which seldom leads to any fortunate issue. "Though it might be unwise to run hastily into expense by embarking on a large scale in manufacturing speculations, more ought certainly to be made, or at least attempted, than had yet been done, of the looms of which they were already possessed. What if they fitted up all the underground apartments in the workhouse as shops? what if they provided some addition to the machinery—looked out for a competent person to take charge of it—paid him liberally, and employed in learning the business the children of such paupers as were out of regular employ, and by reason of their numerous families, were a serious burthen to the parish? To such a project no reasonable objection could be offered; and should it succeed—should the

demand for the manufactured goods go beyond the supply, and an opportunity offer of turning more idle hands into the same line,—why, then they could gradually enlarge both their manufactory and their buildings, till in the end Waltham might become, as it were of its own accord, a flourishing place."

It was in vain that Giles Solley on the one hand, and Mr. Jonathan Salvage on the other, protested against this scheme: the one, dreading, as the worst of all possible calamities such a change as success must effect in the manners and habits of the people—the other, giving it as his firm opinion that success could not possibly attend efforts so contemptible. They alike addressed their appeals to prejudiced auditors. "What are you to gain," said the one, "when you have gained everything except a rapid increase of population, and, of course, a constant liability to distress?" "How can you hope," exclaimed the other, "to push advantageously the manufacture of an article which is fabricated in every workhouse within the compass of twenty miles, and with which, of course, all your markets are glutted?" But the arguments of both were treated with neglect: a resolution was put and carried, "That there were facilities in the place for establishing a profitable

trade in sacking, of which due advantage had not heretofore been taken." This was followed by other resolutions, to the effect that it was desirable to amend the error; and, last of all, a committee was named for the purpose of devising and carrying into effect the most judicious method of acting up to the views of the meeting.

CHAPTER II.

SEEK AND FIND.

While the parishioners of Waltham were thus holding consultations, and devising schemes for the better management of their surplus poor, Charlotte Amos was reaping to its fullest extent the bitter fruits of the sort of education which had been bestowed upon her, and of the wretched example to which all her days she had been subjected.

When she quitted the workhouse, the unfortunate girl was not only without a plan for the guidance of her future life, but in a frame of mind which in a great measure unfitted her for forming one. Between her mother and herself there had never existed any cordiality of feeling. Raised, by the cultivation which her intellectual faculty had received, above her natural level, Charlotte could not always hold back even the expression of her disgust when she contemplated the coarseness of her mother's manners, lis-

tened to her rude conversation, and, above all, recollected the stigma which her frailty had cast upon her offspring. Her mother, on the other hand, was jealous of Charlotte's accomplishments, and of the influence which she exercised over her father. And hence, though they equally avoided an open breach during what may be called their prosperous days, the intercourse that subsisted between them was far from tending to promote their mutual happiness, or endear them one to the other. When the tide of misfortune broke in, however, the feeble barriers which delicacy had thrown up were swept away at once. Charlotte, deprived of her father's countenance—poor, and, above all, convicted of folly, became an object of constant vituperation to her parent, who seemed to take a savage delight in witnessing her humiliation and exaggerating her misery.

"A pretty pass things have come to, surelie!" was the chorus of all the woman's songs. "Poor I, that never had no larning, and know'd no better, couldn't be forgiven—not I—because I lived with my own master and bore him a family. But Miss, who goes to a French boarding-school, and plays the pianny, may do just what she likes—take up with Lord knows who, and disgrace herself and all connected with her as often as she pleases.

Well, I was never put to bed in a workhouse, anyhow; though I'm thinking there's a fine lady, not a hundred miles off, that'll be glad to be there when her turn comes."

From such society Charlotte withdrew without a pang even to the workhouse; nor was the idea of returning to it, under any circumstances, permitted to cross her mind for a moment.

When I say that Charlotte Amos turned her back on the last receptacle of the miserable, destitute of all plan, and of the power of forming one, it is right that I should be fully understood. Plan she certainly had none; that is to say, though a constant subject of thought to herself, she never conjured up pictures except of a creature friendless, houseless, desolate, betrayed, broken-hearted. Over the utter darkness through which such characters appeared, moreover, scarcely one ray of hope was thrown: for Charlotte had never learned to pray; and the guilty and the wretched, who know not how to seek for comfort except in scenes from which guilt and wretchedness exclude them, are and must be miserable indeed.

Still there lingered within her heart a vague and indefinite project, — a wish, rather than

a design, to seek out Marshall, in spite of all the wrongs that he had done her, and to throw herself on his compassion. For woman in her natural state is a strange creature: wrong her, abuse her, lacerate her noblest feelings, and if she have once loved, she never ceases to love, no matter how unworthy the object may be on which her devotion has been fixed; nay, it does sometimes happen, that in exact proportion to the tyrant's unworthiness is the degree of influence which he is enabled to exercise over the victim of his baseness. Such, at least, was the case here. Charlotte knew that the man to whom she had given up all, had left her to poverty and to shame; yet she continued to dwell upon his image as it appeared to her when first he succeeded in establishing a mastery over her affections, forgetting the use to which his power had been turned, and its consequences, of which she was now reaping the fruits.

So blindly had Charlotte loved, and so completely was she thrown by circumstances on this single picture, which a diseased fancy had sketched out, that the utter dispersion of the dreams which Marshall's mysterious converse had created failed to awaken her to the truth. She knew that he was neither Lord

Palmerston, nor any other public man; she knew that he was a detected smuggler, and that the delicate negotiations in which her father had been employed, and in conducting which his life became a sacrifice, proved to be, after all, nothing more nor less than the management of a contraband trade. Yet her romantic imagination continued to clothe the heartless ruffian who had robbed her of peace, with a thousand noble attributes, such as the writers of fiction are sometimes apt to attribute to those who war against laws purely artificial;—nay, in the delicate nature of his position, she was enabled to find an excuse for the haste and apparent indifference with which he had abandoned her. How could he, who dared to oppose himself to constituted authorities, venture to indulge in the hour of peril the more tender emotions of the heart? No, no, she must not blame him too much: he had the best excuse in the pressing hazard of his situation, and had doubtless been put to it ever since in screening himself from ruin; and if he did fail to communicate by letter, doubtless the habits of his life taught him a degree of caution, of which it would be impossible for her to calculate the importance. She was certain that in his heart he loved her still;

she was not less certain, that could she only discover his retreat, he would welcome her still to his bosom,—nay, that he would link their fates together in a way which must render the one partaker in every sense of the other's good or evil fortune. Therefore she had no wish on earth except to find him out; and as to the rest, all that she would willingly leave to his honour and to his love.

Such had been the tenor of the poor girl's waking thoughts and sleeping dreams ever since "the sorrows of death compassed her about." Now that she was delivered from these, and at the same time warned that a home in the parish workhouse could no longer be afforded, she resolved, let happen what might, to attempt their realization. Of Marshall's destiny she knew no more than that he was said to have taken his departure for London; and in London she resolved to seek him. Instead, therefore, of returning to her mother's house, she hurried, after parting from her babe, through the village, alike regardless of the extent of way which it would be necessary to traverse, and of the absolute destitution of her own case when it should have been accomplished. Nor was this all: Charlotte set out to accomplish a journey of sixty miles

on foot without a shilling in her pocket. Her dress, too, was quite inappropriate to the mode in which she proposed to travel; being more suitable, both in texture and form, to what had once been, than to what now was, her condition; while her fragile form, her small and delicate features, her extreme beauty despite of the pallor on her cheek, could not but render her an object of impertinent curiosity to every individual whom she might chance to pass. Of all these matters Charlotte was either forgetful or regardless. The single precaution which an innate sense of modesty induced her to take, was to drop a green gauze veil over her face; and then, with a black silk cloak wrapped round her, and a little basket in her hand, containing a crust of bread and a morsel of cheese, she hastened forward at a rate which, as has been shown elsewhere, painfully attracted the notice of one of the villagers.

It was towards the end of September when Charlotte Amos set out upon her pilgrimage. The day was beautifully bright. Through the clear blue sky overhead not a cloud was floating; the trees were still loaded with a dark green foliage; and the hedges, though robbed of their summer livery, retained that of early

autumn. Of the harvest, moreover, the last gleanings remained; for in the hop-gardens on either side of the way the pickers were busy, and cheerful was the hum of their voices as it came up upon the light breeze, interrupted from time to time by peals of laughter. Poor Charlotte heard these sounds, for her outward senses were acute as they had ever been, but they created no emotion of joy in her heart. On the contrary, she redoubled her speed for a while as often as she came to the vicinity of a spot over which groups of the merry country-folks were scattered, and relaxed only when she felt or fancied that no human being was near. For memory and imagination, struggling for superiority, threw her by degrees into a sort of waking trance, which rendered her quite unconscious both of the passage of time and of the use which she herself was making of it; nay, so dense was the haze which enveloped her understanding, that more than one public vehicle passed without her observing that the coachman had pulled up and offered her a seat to town. The truth is, that she came at length to such a state as to resemble rather a sleep-walker than any other object in nature. Though both eyes and ears were open, she neither heard nor saw, be-

cause every faculty was overborne except the power of thought.

With the faculties of reason and observation thus suspended, fatigue itself made no impression on her. She walked on and on without pausing to rest, till the sun, which had shone bright in mid-heaven at the commencement of her journey, sank under the horizon. The growing darkness recalled her to a sense of her immediate condition; imagination ceased to keep the other powers of the mind suspended, and, like one who is suddenly roused from a dream, she stopped and gazed round. The first sensation that came upon her in full force was a consciousness of extreme weariness: her knees shook; her eyes danced in her head; and had she not staggered towards a heap of stones by the wayside, and thrown herself down upon them, she must have fallen. Neither the outward senses, however, nor the ability of using them, were affected. She saw that she was on the outskirts of a town or large village, of which the principal street seemed to be alive with country people; while a field hard by was crowded with booths, tents, caravans, stalls, and other appendages of a fair. The sounds, likewise, that fell upon her ear all denoted a scene of revelry and dissipation. Drums were beat-

ing, clarionets sounding, bugles ringing, fifes screaming, and the pipe and tabour were heard only at intervals over the shouts of children, and the loud murmur of hundreds of talkers. If the consideration of possible difficulties to be surmounted ever did occur to her while meditating the enterprise in which she was now engaged, she had certainly not contemplated the hazard of being opposed to such as appeared now to bar her further progress. What was she to do? How could she venture to pass, alone and unprotected, amid crowds of drunken and dissolute people? and above all, where was she to spend the night? If her purse had been ever so well filled, could she hope to find fitting accommodation where every place of public entertainment seemed crowded with revellers? and destitute as she was of the means of paying even for a bed, who would take her in? For the first time since the idea of seeking Marshall took possession of her mind, a feeling not far distant from misgiving came over her. She repented, not that she had quitted Waltham, but that she had done so with a precipitancy which rendered preparation and forethought impossible, and almost wished that she were back again beside her infant in the workhouse.

Charlotte had taken her seat so near to the

entrance of the field where the fair seemed chiefly to be held, that it seemed next to impossible that she should long escape the observation of the crowds that were continually passing to and fro. She was neither unaware of this fact, nor of the inconveniences which were likely to arise from it; yet so thoroughly was her strength exhausted, that the thought of moving was intolerable to her. Timidly, therefore, and distrustingly, she looked through the deepening gloom upon each fresh group as it went or came; and thankful was she to find that all were too much occupied with concerns of their own to pay any regard to her. And thus it continued to be till twilight sank into night, of which the darkness was the more felt in the place where she was sitting, by reason of the glare which scores of lamps, flambeaux, and torches threw over the scene of the revel. "Oh that I could discover some shed or barn," exclaimed the unhappy girl at length, "under whose roof my aching head might find shelter!" She made a desperate effort as she pronounced these words, and rose; but before she had quitted the spot, a half-drunken rustic, attracted, as it seemed, by the movement, reeled towards her and threw his arm round her waist.

"What dost here, my pretty wench?" hic-

cupped the assailant. "Thee must go with me. There's plenty of nice gals in that 'ere booth; and thee can dance as well as the best on 'em, I'se warrant thee."

Charlotte struggled to free herself from his grasp, but retained sufficient self-command to suppress a scream.

"Pooh, pooh, lovey!" continued the ruffian; "it's no use kicking and flinging. Thee shall be my partner, that's sartain sure; and thee shall gi'e me a kiss or ever thee be half-an-hour older."

"Let me go, man!" cried Charlotte, whom he increasing rudeness of the savage both agitated and alarmed: "I am no acquaintance of yours, and you have no right to use me so. Let me go, or I will cry murder, and then——"

"Shout as loud as ever thee can, lovey—shout, and let thy pretty voice be heard, and see who 'll attend to it. Only doan't y'ee bite and scratch—'cause I woan't stand that no how, from man or woman."

Charlotte struggled vehemently to shake off a grasp which became each instant more ferocious and more alarming. Her bonnet was soon crushed in the contest, and her basket torn from her arm; yet so totally inadequate

was she to resist the giant strength of a man who seemed manifestly bent on doing her an injury, that she could not hinder him from lifting her from the ground, and bearing her away in a direction opposite to that whither at first he had proposed to carry her. She now felt that to keep silence any longer could not lead to good, but to evil: she screamed aloud, and, in the madness of despair, thrust both her hands into his face with a violence which caused him to stagger.

"Curse thee!" cried the brute, dashing her to the ground, "thee hast put out my eye; but it shall be the worst job thee ever set about!"

He sprang towards her as he said this; but taking advantage of the momentary respite which his first motion, under the influence of pain, had occasioned, she was already on her feet, and hurrying towards the lights. Fear lent her wings; and though the miscreant followed hard upon her heels, she was already within the gateway that communicated between the field and the road ere he overtook her. Then, however, the grasp of a strong hand upon her cloak made her aware that escape was next to impossible. But her presence of mind did not forsake her. As the ruffian

pulled hard, she undid the fastening that begirt her neck, cast loose her arms from the mantle, and left it in his hand. He fell; and she was again enabled to leave him some paces behind. But such a scene could not take place without attracting general attention even amid the festivities of a fair. The crowd hastened to surround her: some shouted, some laughed, some seized her clothes, some cried "Shame to abuse the girl!" while she, imploring them to let her pass, plunged at every step deeper and deeper into difficulties.

"There goes thy Pall, Ben!" cried several voices at once. "After her, man! after her!"

"Will nobody save me?" exclaimed the unhappy girl when, looking back, she beheld her brutal enemy within a few paces of her. She stood at this time close to a caravan within which, as a copious hand-bill announced, was exhibited "The wonderful Scotch giantess, Miss Mungo Campbell, only nineteen years of age, and upwards of seven feet high." Her eye chanced in its wanderings to traverse the sort of platform on which, outside the show-place, the attendants of the giantess were collected, and instantly rested on one, apparently the master of the ceremonies, who was in the act of haranguing the mob. A scream, louder,

clearer, more shrill than that which terror wrings from mortal lips, burst from hers. She bounded forward, sprang up the steps or ladder that conducted to the stage, and lay, motionless and insensible, in the arms of Marshall.

CHAPTER III.

MAN'S CONSTANCY.

It would be useless to attempt any description of the scene to which this extraordinary meeting gave immediate rise. The crowd yelled, jeered, shouted, roared, laughed: the brute who had so unintentionally assisted Charlotte in accomplishing the object of her journey could with difficulty be restrained from following her into the caravan, within which Marshall, too much astonished fully to comprehend the nature of his own feelings, had immediately conveyed her. With respect to Charlotte herself, she continued so long in a state of absolute unconsciousness, that even the heartless crew by whom she was surrounded became, if not softened, at least alarmed. At last she opened her eyes; and beholding the only picture in nature on which her imagination dwelt with delight, Marshall himself, leaning as it seemed affectionately over her, she closed them again, as if fearful of dispell-

ing so sweet a delusion. But when she heard the tones of his voice—when she felt her hand pressed warmly within his, and listened to the inquiries which he made into her condition—pronounced, as it seemed to her, with the same soft cadence which used in former days to breathe music to her ear,—doubt, fear, hope,—the memory of the past, the anticipation of the future,—all seemed to become absorbed in a sense of immediate and complete happiness. She sat up, and throwing her arms round his neck, wept aloud.

"Can this be reality?" exclaimed she, as soon as the power of utterance returned. "Am I awake? or is it only a dream that will pass away as hundreds of others have passed, and leave me to my sorrow?"

"And I, too, Charlotte," replied Marshall, "what am I to think? Whence come you—whither are you going—what brought you here?"

"To seek you, Marshall,—my own, my own Marshall! Oh, if you knew what I have suffered since you abandoned me! Why did you leave me—why did you not take me with you? But all that is over now and forgotten. I have found you again; I am again in your arms; and what is there in life or in death

that I have cause to regret so long as you are with me?"

"Hulloa, Bill Jones!" interposed a gruff voice, while the wooden fabric shook as the speaker made a stride in advance; "what the devil does all this mean? Are we going to have the romantics again? A nice Lothario I have got for a husband, to be sure! a perfect lady-killer, by the holy jingo! D—n me, explain, and bundle this minx out of my caravan, either before or after, or else blow me tight if I don't do it myself."

Charlotte looked up, and beheld standing, beside the sort of couch on which she was herself reclining, an object which caused every other feeling to be swallowed up in disgust and terror. An enormous woman, probably six feet three inches in height, but of a breadth and thickness which defied computation, whose fingers were each equal in circumference to an ordinary female's wrist, and her face large, round, and swollen with the grossest indulgences, glared upon her with eyes so sunken between a pair of overhanging brows and the puff of the cheeks below, as to display no portion of their shape, except the sharp and keen pupils, that shot living fire into the frame of the fragile thing on whom they were fixed.

Neither was the effect diminished by the strange costume in which the monster was arrayed. A lofty turban, covered with spangles, surmounted her head; her robe was loose and flowing, composed of muslin and bedizened with faded tinsel; a massy gilt chain hung round her neck, and huge rings were on her fingers. Charlotte turned away with a shudder from the hideous spectacle, that she might cling apparently for protection to Marshall;—a movement which was not lost upon the giantess, and certainly did not tend to soothe her.

"I say, Jones," continued the ogre, in a voice which more resembled the croaking of a raven than any other natural sound; "do ye think I can stand being insulted at this rate before my very face? Turn the hussey out, or by the holy poker——"

"Look ye, mother," replied Marshall, "there's no occasion to get warm. This girl is an old acquaintance of mine; you must see that she is ill and has been ill-used, and you would not have me play the brute so completely as to kick her out to be torn in pieces by the drunken clodhoppers below? Have a little patience, and if I can't explain all to your satisfaction, why then I must take the consequences."

"Explain all, you ungrateful beggar!" answered the virago. "What need is there of explanation? Don't I see how it is? This is another act of the Brummagem tragedy, and you think I'm going to be gulled a second time. I tell you I won't: so take your choice; bundle her out this instant, or else—right about face, march!"

"Sarves you right, mother," interposed a third party,—a man dressed in a tawdry silk jacket, who had been beating a tambourine to the sound of a clarionet and a pair of cymbals just before Charlotte broke in upon the amusements of the company;—"can't say I pity you at all;—had no business to take up with that 'ere wagabond chap, when you had one like myself at your command, what had never played you false at no time;—but suppose it was his smooth glib tongue as did it."

"Who wants any of your advice, jackanapes?" answered the female fury, turning sharp upon the last speaker. "You've lived so long on my bounty that you think you've a right to speak your mind, do you? But you're mistaken too. Howsomever, I can't much blame you neither; for I've been cruelly used, that's sartain."

As she said this, the monster sat down upon a bench that groaned under her weight, and pulling a sort of shawl from her huge pocket, applied one corner of it to her eyes. In the mean while, Charlotte, trembling and agitated, clung round Marshall's neck, and entreated to be taken away. "Anywhere, anywhere, dear Marshall," was her reply, when he ventured to ask whither she desired to go — "anywhere, so that I am with you, and away from that hideous creature."

"What's that she says?" exclaimed the giantess, on whom the latter part of Charlotte's appeal had not been lost. 'Away from that hideous creature?' And who is the hideous creature, ma'am? Is it a respectable woman like me, well put on, and honestly married— to her sorrow be it spoken!—or a tattered trollop that comes bouncing through a fair, chased by half-a-dozen fellows all at once, to throw herself into the arms of another woman's lawful husband? Hideous creature, indeed! Fire and fury, but I could find in my heart to toss that scarecrow carcass of yours over the balustrade. Howsoever, it comes to this: Do you mean to send your miss about her business, Mr. Jones, or am I to send you packing? for one thing or

the other will happen, you may depend upon it."

"Hark you, mother," exclaimed Marshall, affecting in his turn to wax warm: "keep a civil tongue in your head anyhow, and don't give names to other people before you know whether they deserve them. It may happen that this poor girl has just as much claim upon me as you have, and just as good a right to call herself an honest woman. I tell you, she's my sister. Don't you hear how she speaks to me? Look up, Charlotte, love, and tell Mrs. Jones the truth. Are you not my sister,—my dear, dear sister? Am not I your brother?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!" exclaimed Charlotte, conscious only that some disguise was necessary, and that without practising it there was a hazard of being separated from Marshall. "You are everything in the world to me—father, mother, brother, everything; for you I live, for you I am willing to die."

"Nay, if that be it," observed the giantess, moving a little to one side, and pushing forward a lamp that she might examine the contour of Charlotte's countenance more narrowly. "If she be indeed your sister, why didn't you say so? But I doubt she is not: I

see no resemblance between you at all; and her manner of addressing you at first was scarcely such as sisters are accustomed to employ towards their brothers."

"I tell you, mother," cried Marshall, withdrawing from Charlotte's embrace, and confronting the virago with the air of a man who feels himself insulted, "that I won't put up with such treatment any longer. Here have I been, for six months, as true to you as ever slave to his mistress; and I have had as my reward the constant infliction of injuries like this. But this far surpasses them all. You know under what circumstances I left home, and that my family was reduced by the same misfortune that broke me down; and now, when I meet my youngest and favourite sister, a wanderer and an outcast, you fly into a passion and threaten Lord knows all what, because I am willing to afford her shelter for her head. Speak out, Charlotte, dear, and tell this angry woman what brought you here: was it not in search of me that you quitted your mother's roof?"

"It was, it was, Marshall!" answered Charlotte, now looking up; "but I did not leave my mother's roof—the workhouse!"

"Good God!" exclaimed Marshall, striking

his hands together with well-acted sorrow, "and has it come to this? My poor old mother and all her children reduced to seek shelter in the workhouse?"

"Now don't take on so, Bill, dear," interposed the giantess, her features becoming even more hideous under the influence of compassion than of anger. "Haven't I told you a thousand times to forget past sorrows, and to find consolation with one who has only one wish upon earth—to make you happy? Your sister shall be welcome to stay with us as long as she pleases;—ay, and a nice pretty creature she is! Come and kiss me, my dear, and dry those pretty eyes. We'll make you happy, depend on it. I say, Tom, go and fetch the gin-bottle: the girl seems faint—she'll be the better for a dram."

Charlotte cast an imploring glance towards Marshall, and perceiving from the peculiar expression of his countenance that she was expected to fall in with the humours of her new protectress, she did not even shudder while the enormous animal encircled her in an embrace more akin to the hug of a Polar bear than to the salutation of a Christian. Of the gin, however, she positively refused to par-

take; indicating only that she was anxious to lay down her weary head in some place where the tumult of the fair might not reach her. Nor, indeed, were her own declarations necessary to convince even the ogress of the deplorable state to which fatigue and anxiety had reduced her.

"But you will not leave me, Marshall!" continued the heart-broken creature, when the being who seemed to control both his fate and her own consented to her removal to the inn where the company put up. "I could not survive the night were you to abandon me. There is no face here except yours that I recognise; there is no one that cares for me. Rather let me stay here all night, than be required to go where you are not, even if I die before morning."

"You wouldn't have your brother sleep with you, child?" demanded the giantess, half jocularly, half in anger.

"Such brothers and sisters have been known to do as much ere now," observed the tambour-beater, thrusting his tongue in his cheek. But he had immediate cause to repent of the insinuation; for the giantess, seizing a wooden roller that happened to lie within reach, lent

him such a blow upon the head, that in spite of the protection afforded by a stuffed silk cap, it felled him to the floor.

"Take that, you saucy-tongued jackanapes!" said she; "and as to you, child, your brother shall go with you, and stay with you too. When that addle-pated fool gets up again, he shall be promoted for one evening to the post of honour; while you, Bill, conduct your sister to the Swan, and take every care of her. But mind, I expect to find you ready to give me your company when we shut up shop. The poor thing must be sound asleep long before midnight; and I take it midnight will scarcely see us out of this, particularly after so long an interruption. So pop out quickly by the trap-door; and see, wrap this shawl round the young creature's shoulders. My bonnet won't fit her, otherwise she might have that too. But we can get her own repaired, I dare say, in the course of to-morrow; and then we shall have time, too, to consider how she may be made serviceable to the concern. These sweet eyes and these pretty features want only a little colour to make them a show of themselves. Get her a good supper, Bill, and tell the chambermaid to provide the best bed in the house. Good night, dear!—you and I will be good

friends yet, depend on it; for I will love you for your brother's sake." So saying, the giantess again saluted Charlotte, who, rather borne than led by Marshall out of the caravan, was conducted without difficulty through the crowd towards the village.

"And now, dearest Marshall," said she, when she found herself alone with him in a neat little parlour of the inn, "do tell me how it is that I find you thus. I know that many of the fantasies in which I used to indulge are faded; but as I never loved you except for your own sake, their departure has not cost me one pang: yet I am strangely bewildered by all that has passed to-night."

"Not more bewildered than I, Charlotte," replied Marshall, in a tone which seemed to her to have lost something of its tenderness: "the whole thing indeed is to me a mystery that I cannot solve. In the name of fate, how came you to think of seeking me out at all, and to find me too where you did?"

"Seek *you*, Marshall,—seek *you* out! I have done so in my waking thoughts and in my sleeping dreams ever since that night on which we parted. I have seen no object but you; I have heard no sounds but those of your voice; my very babe I have left behind, be-

cause I could not carry it. Do not ask me why I have done this, for your own heart can answer."

"I wish it had been otherwise, though," replied Marshall. "If you had had a little patience, things might have righted themselves; and you had my assurance that, whenever they did right, I would return to claim you. But you have got me into a scrape now, from which there are no means of escape except one. That fury has me in her power. She is a sharp-witted devil, too; and though the drink and her own perverseness have contributed to blind her for an hour or two, she will see clearly enough how the land lies by-and-by. Therefore I must make the most of my time, by starting for town in the coach, of which I now hear the guard blowing his horn."

"You will not abandon me again, Marshall!" exclaimed Charlotte wildly; "you will not leave me here, alone, unfriended, miserable. Oh, take me with you! I care not how you use me, so that I do but see you; I care not what language you apply to me, so that I hear you speak; I care not what my fate may be, so long as you share it with me. Marshall, I will be your slave;—trample on

me, beat me, abuse me; only do not, do not leave me again!"

"Silly girl!" answered Marshall, on whom, however, the energy of her manner had manifestly produced an effect; "are you in a condition to travel? How could you survive the fatigue of such a journey, after all that you have gone through to-day? Rather trust to my honour; and while I leave you my address, with the means of paying your fare in the morning if you need it, let me go alone to-night. A few hours' sleep will restore you, and we will be sure to meet to-morrow."

"I am fresh, I am perfectly fresh!" shrieked Charlotte, while she sprang to her feet; "I have sustained no fatigue. To the end of the world I will travel, provided you are my companion. But to lose you again,—no, Marshall, no, not even for one hour will I consent to that! Take me with you, or see me die at your feet."

"Well, then, if it must be so," replied he, "at least swallow a glass of wine ere we set out." He rang the bell and ordered a pint of sherry. He poured out a large glass, and handed it to Charlotte, who drank it off eagerly. He filled another: she would have refused;

but he pressed it upon her, and she obeyed. A third was taken under similar circumstances, without one morsel of solid food having passed her lips since an early hour in the morning. This was too much; the poison—for in her situation it acted as such—did its work. Her brain swam round; her speech faltered; she staggered in her gait; sickness followed, and she became unconscious in his arms. He laid her gently down upon the sofa, and by some extraordinary impulse guided, felt her pockets —they were empty. A cold smile passed over his features. "No, no, poor devil!" said he aloud, "it shan't be said that I left you destitute: here is enough, and more than enough, to carry you back to Waltham." As he uttered these words, he slid a small green purse, containing one gold and a few silver coins, into her bosom, and turning upon his heel, quitted the apartment.

"Anybody for London?" shouted the coachman.

"One outside passenger," was the answer; after which Marshall sprang upon the roof, and the vehicle drove off.

CHAPTER IV.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

"WHERE am I?" cried Charlotte, as the shaking of a rude hand brought back the sense of existence without restoring the faculties to their tone,—"Where am I? and where, where is Marshall?"

"Where are you?" answered a loud and harsh voice: "where the devil should you be but in the Black Swan at Sittingbourne? But where is my husband? what have you done with him, she-devil that you are?—where is Bill Jones?"

"Who is Bill Jones?" demanded Charlotte, raising herself on one elbow, while with the other hand she rubbed her eyes and shook aside the tresses from her brow.

"There's a pretty question for a sister to put!" replied the giantess, who, with her *corps dramatique*, stood round the poor girl's couch. "A pure chaste sister sure, that doesn't

know her own brother's name! But it won't do, minx—not a bit of it: tell what you have done with my Bill, or, by the living jingo, I 'll shake the life out of you!"

The monster seized her by the hair as she uttered this, and dragged her from the sofa to the floor. Charlotte shrieked aloud; while Tom, the tambourine-beater, hastily interfering, implored his mistress to control her fury.

"We'll have the devil to pay in five minutes: the constables are in the house at this moment; and if the girl scream again, a month at the treadmill will be the least we shall get by it."

"Curse the constables! curse the magistrates! curse the treadmill! curse everything!" exclaimed the infuriated giantess: "I tell you, I 'll tear her limb from limb if she don't tell me this instant what she has done with my husband!"

"Indeed, indeed," cried Charlotte, terrified out of all self-command, "I cannot answer that question. I do not know who your husband is, nor where he has gone; I assure you I do not: I would tell you if I could."

"Now isn't that enough to provoke a saint!" roared out the giantess; "don't know my husband—don't know your own brother! I ask you where is Bill Jones?"

"I know nobody of the name; believe me, I don't."

"What! not know him as took you into the caravan, and brought you here?"

"Oh, you mean Marshall!—my Marshall! Pray, pray, if you have any pity in you, tell me where he is. Ah! I remember now; he did not wish to carry me with him—I was to wait here till to-morrow—he would leave me his address. Where is it, woman?—you have stolen it from me; where is it, I say?"

Charlotte sprang to her feet as she uttered this, and put her hand first into her pockets, and then into her bosom. From the latter she drew out the purse. "What is this?" cried she. "Money! I had no money. Who gave me this? Oh, I see, I see! Let me pass, inhuman monster!—I say, let me pass! You shall not detain me here; you have no authority; I am no prisoner. You won't?" she continued, observing that the giantess, with a devilish grin, threw herself between her and the door: "then I will see whether there is no assistance to be had elsewhere."

She sprang to the bell-rope, and ere Tom, who grasped at her arm, could restrain it, rang the bell furiously.

"Now, mother, it's no use kicking up a

row," said he, running immediately to the giantess; "the girl clearly knows as little about Bill as we do; and if it were otherwise, no good can come of a fight with all the neighbourhood. For God's sake keep quiet. If you must have that scapegrace,—and for my part, I think there be as good men as he in the world,—depend upon it, you won't get him the sooner for being a month in Canterbury gaol. And as to her, what 's the use in being angry? Don't you see, that if she has been a gallivant of his'un, he has given her the go-by?"

Before the monster could reply, the landlord himself, attracted by the violence with which the bell had been rung, entered the room. He looked excessively displeased, and was proceeding to demand why such people presumed to bring discredit on his house by misconducting themselves, when Charlotte, rushing past her tormentor, grasped his arm and implored him to protect her.

"From whom, poor thing?" asked the landlord; "who presumes to offer you insult or injury under my roof?"

"She! that huge misshapen savage!" exclaimed Charlotte; "that hideous toad, that calls herself Marshall's wife, and orders me to tell whither he has gone."

"Thou chitty-faced wretch!" shrieked the ogress, "if I should hang for thee, d—n me if I don't do thy business!"

She strode towards her victim as she spoke, and in all probability would have carried her threat into execution, had not the landlord, by a sudden movement of his arm, thrust Charlotte before him outside the door and closed it. It was fortunate for both that the key happened to be on their side, and that the landlord had time to turn it ere the virago thought of resisting the latter movement; for the pull that she gave to the handle was such as caused the very hinges to shake; and her cry of disappointed rage, when the door refused to open, resembled the angry roar of a tiger.

"Go hide thyself, my dear!" exclaimed the kind-hearted landlord; "the brute will kill thee without doubt if she lay hands on thee; and I fully expect to see the panels fly in five minutes."

Neither was he deceived. Charlotte had barely time to escape down stairs, and to take shelter in the kitchen, when a kick from the foot of the giantess split the door of the apartment to shivers. But this was more than even the landlord of the Black Swan could endure. The constables were called in: they

mounted the staircase courageously enough, and one even ventured to unlock the fragment of the door. But when there appeared in the aperture such an apparition as the infuriated monster, now armed with the poker, the hardihood of the bravest gave way. The retreat was by many degrees more rapid than the advance, and the giantess stood on the landing-place victorious and exulting. It seemed too as if the conviction of her own triumph had in some sort appeased her fury, for she burst into a loud horse-laugh, and defying the men in office to approach at their peril, called in a more conciliating tone upon the landlord. Nevertheless, her invitation, though given with all possible cordiality, could not prevail on him to accept the proffered glass of punch; though he was enough of a diplomatist to accept, on her own terms, the peace towards which that invitation was evidently an overture.

While the landlord and his huge guest were thus negociating matters of peace and war, Charlotte had become to the occupants of the kitchen an object not more of curiosity than of interest. The story of her ill usage in the crowd, of her extraordinary recognition of one of the showmen, and of her arrival at the inn

in his company,—of his abrupt departure, and, lastly, of the violence offered to her by the giantess,—was already current, with numerous exaggerations, throughout the house; and to do the gossips justice, it excited in them a sincere commiseration for the poor girl's fate. Nor did her appearance in any degree tend to abate the public sympathy. Her extreme youth, added to her beauty, which, though mellowed, was not defaced by all that she had undergone, affected the men with a degree of admiration not far removed from passion; while the women, regarding her as the victim of perfidy and broken vows, seemed as if they did not know how sufficiently to assure her of their pity. To all this, however, Charlotte was, if not inattentive, absolutely indifferent. She thanked those around her earnestly, accepted their marks of kindness with gentleness,—but neither entered, nor pretended to enter, into their feelings.

"Can you tell me whither he has gone?" was the sole reply which she made to the well-intentioned invectives which they heaped upon her betrayer: "He said he would leave his address, and I am sure he did so, seeing that the wine proved too much for my feeble frame, and rendered me incapable of travelling. But it is gone; and if any of you have it, oh,

give it back to me, and take all that I have in exchange."

"Poor thing, poor thing!" exclaimed the cook, as she hastened to bring forth from her own private store a cold fowl denuded of only a single wing; "he 's gone, that you may depend on. These men are all faithless; there 's not one on 'em to be trusted. But that needn't keep you from eating a bit of supper; and you shan't be charged for it a halfpenny, for this is my perquisite: so sit and eat, and welcome."

"And here 's some wine," cried the head-waiter, running to his peculiar cupboard and producing a bottle. "It's no use refusing to support nature; that won't mend the matter, at all events. Howsomever, I don't think any of us has his address, if he did leave one. But if you 'll just rest satisfied till Roger the coachman comes back—and he returns to-morrow night—he'll tell you where he put him down anyhow; and mayhap you may be able to trace him for yourself."

"Will he, will he indeed!" cried Charlotte eagerly: "will he be able to tell me where he was put down. Oh, I will wait thankfully—that is, if you are sure we may expect to see him to-morrow morning."

"I didn't say to-morrow morning, my dear,"

replied the waiter; "I said to-morrow night: and you can go with him the night after, if you be so inclined."

"What! wait here two days and two nights without seeking Marshall! No; I will rather walk every foot of the way, and set out this instant."

"No, no, my dear, you must not talk of that," interposed a well-dressed man, who had hitherto sat apart without joining in the conversation. "I go up at eight in the morning; and if you choose to come with me, you shall have your seat for nothing; and, what's more, as I take it you're a stranger to London, you shan't be without a place to shelter you. So go to sleep to-night if you can; and Sally will call you in good time;—won't you, Sally?"

"Yes, yes," answered the individual thus appealed to, a well-dressed, smart-looking wench; "I'll call her in time: but if I was Mrs. Johnson, I don't think I should quite fancy my husband's taking such an interest in an entire stranger."

"Now, Sal, thou art a jealous toad," replied the coachman. "But no matter; thou art a kind one too. So put the girl to bed, get her up again in good time, and leave me to manage with Mrs. Johnson just as I manage with you."

Under the guidance of Sal, Charlotte, after eating rather to please her kind friends than to allay any hunger of which she was conscious, withdrew to a sleeping-room. It contained two beds, in one of which her companion usually slept; and Charlotte was well pleased when the girl announced her intention of doing so that night, if not disagreeable to the other party. Now poor Charlotte was precisely in that frame of mind when to be left entirely alone is almost sure to induce either madness or desperation. Not all the sophistry of an enamoured imagination could entirely shut her eyes to the fact that Marshall had again deserted her, under circumstances which were, to say the least of them, very suspicious. Had she, therefore, been permitted to brood over the case in absolute solitude and darkness, her own heart whispered that perhaps the worst conclusion might be drawn. For there is a power in solitude of disentangling truth from falsehood, of which those, and those alone can speak, who have tried it. Place the ruined man, for example, in a crowd, and he finds neither time nor leisure to think; give him a single companion, and even though that companion be silent, he will still see things through a flattering medium. But let him be

alone and feel that he is alone, and hope ceases to delude. So it would have been with Charlotte that night; and, with a sort of intuitive perception of her own precise state, she felt that it would have been so. Instead, therefore, of offering opposition to the proposed continuance of the chambermaid in the apartment, she expressed herself delighted with the arrangement. Nor did the effects falsify her reasoning, if such it may be called. Sal, having no cares to harass her, conversed but little after her head was once laid on the pillow; and her sleep was as sound as the labour of the body, when unaccompanied by distress of mind, never fails to produce. Yet the sound of her breathing exercised over Charlotte's fancy a mysterious control, which hindered it from conjuring up images at least of unbroken horror. She lay awake, it is true, for hours, and thought was as busy as with the miserable it always is. Nevertheless, there was a fringe of white bordering every dark image which either memory or imagination called up; and when at last Sleep laid his leaden finger on her eyelids, no hideous dreams broke in upon his sovereignty.

Charlotte had slept several hours soundly, when her companion called her, announcing

that in twenty minutes the coach would be ready to start. She rose in all haste, dressed, and hurried to the kitchen, where the friends who had behaved to her so humanely over-night were assembled to bid her God-speed. They parted from her, moreover, not with kind words only, but with kind actions. One had a bonnet at her service, in the room of that which the ruffian had destr yed over-night; another pressed upon her a warm cloak; a third offered a shawl; a fourth a handkerchief. Nor were these generous menials chary with their purses, however slenderly lined. Moreover, the landlord himself appeared in the list of those whom circumstances had interested in her favour. He came not only to bid her good-b'ye, with an assurance, that to the night's lodging, and any other nourishment which she might have received under his roof, she was heartily welcome; but to tell her that she might feel perfectly secure under the protection of the coachman. "A better man doesn't drive on this road, and his wife is a most respectable person; and therefore, my dear, if you should fail in discovering your brother, or husband, or whatever he may be, my advice to you is, to take a situation in the family, provided they offer it. And I should not wonder if they did;

for no face ever spoke true if you be otherwise than honest and trustworthy."

Poor Charlotte was almost as much overcome by the unlooked-for humanity of these strangers, as she had been by the cruel treatment of those from whom they had delivered her. She wept many tears, and left few dry eyes behind when she mounted the coach-box. Nor had she any cause during the progress of the journey to find fault with the individual who had undertaken to be her protector. She had been too long unaccustomed to the slightest delicacy of bearing not to feel keenly the generous if not polished courtesies of the coachman. He made it his business to point out to her every object worthy of notice as they went along. As often as the coach stopped to change horses, he pressed her to eat or drink, and seemed disappointed that the state of her appetite was not such as to permit her complying on each occasion with his wishes. Moreover, he did his best to convey to her something like a general notion of the enormous city towards which they were hastening. She compared it with Calais, with Dover, with Canterbury: he assured her, that all of them put together would not form one of its most inconsiderable divisions.

"And how am I to find out Marshall in such a place?" demanded she eagerly.

"Indeed, my dear, that's more than I can tell," was the reply. "I only know, that unless you have his address, you may just as well look for a needle in a truss of hay, as go hunting after him through that wilderness of brick and mortar."

Charlotte was horrified; yet hope continued to whisper that all this might be exaggeration. She was sure that London could not be so large as he represented it; she was confident, that by patience and perseverance it would be possible to trace out any individual, however humble. When, however, the vehicle approached the metropolis itself—when the Bricklayers' Arms was left behind, London Bridge crossed—Fish-street entered, and she beheld around her only buildings without end, amid the intervals of which countless masses of people, carriages, waggons, and horses, were passing, her heart sank within her, and she gave up all for lost.

"Oh, I will never, never find him here!" cried she: "I am indeed destitute and forlorn. Oh that I could lie down by the way-side and die!"

"Don't say so, poor girl," exclaimed the humane coachman. "I know nothing of your

history ; I can't tell whether you be deserving of an honest man's notice, or the reverse ; but it is impossible not to feel interested in a young person evidently so forlorn, especially under the circumstances that have brought us acquainted. You shall not go without a friend, unless it be your own fault. My wife and I have been looking out some time for a person to take care of our children, and to give them a rather better education than Sue can give; and I don't know why, but I think you would suit us very well, provided you be willing. What say you ? Will you go home with me, and try how you like the situation? You can but leave it, after all, should it not suit."

Charlotte was wholly overpowered by this truly generous proposal. She shed tears, while she reminded her companion that he was running great risk in thus admitting into his family a perfect stranger ; and acknowledged, that no considerations of personal hazard or inconvenience would have induced her to abandon her original plans, had she not seen how useless it would be to prosecute them. She even went so far as to stipulate that they should inquire at the coach-office whether anybody there recollected Marshall's arrival, or could assist her in tracing him to his present

abode. "If this fail," added she, "and you are yet willing to receive one so destitute under your roof, I will cheerfully endeavour to instruct your children, as far as I am able, without any other remuneration than my board."

"Well then, my dear," replied the coachman, "we may consider the thing as settled; though, on the subject of remuneration, we must have a little further talk; for as to recollecting the faces of those who come and go by the coaches, depend upon it nobody at our office is either able or willing to do anything of the sort."

The coachman was not deceived in the opinion which he had formed. The clerks in the office vouchsafed no other reply to Charlotte's inquiries than a laugh; so she put her arm through that of her protector, as soon as he had settled his business, and accompanied him to his home.

CHAPTER V.

DOMESTIC PEACE.

The house of which Charlotte was now an inmate being situated in one of the most obscure of the lanes that communicate between Bishopsgate-street and Cheapside, presented to her eyes a prospect so completely different from anything to which they had heretofore been accustomed, that at first she could not very well define the sensations to which it gave rise. Within doors there was no lack of comfort: that is to say, the parlour was neatly furnished, and the bed-rooms, though small and miserably ventilated, were clean and tidy; while everything in the style of living adopted by the family indicated a perfect exemption from penury. She found Mrs. Johnson, moreover, and her little ones, precisely such as she should have supposed the wife and children of the worthy coachman to be;—the former, a mild, cleanly, gentle-mannered person; the

latter, docile, good-tempered, and lively. And so far she could not but acknowledge that her lot had been cast for her far more favourably than the utter destitution of her circumstances could have authorized her to anticipate. Yet there was something in the closeness of the atmosphere, in the narrow and choked-up view that met her wherever she turned, that pressed upon the heart of a girl brought up in the country, and never till now thrown into the fetid atmosphere of a great city. Nor was the state of her mind without its effect in causing even these comparatively trifling evils to enlarge their powers. "Oh that I could breathe the free air of some open country!" was a frequent exclamation to which she gave utterance when alone. "These dingy walls press upon my brain. The eye is pained by their closeness: they seem to make the tooth of care sharper. They leave no room for the fancy to fly abroad. And yet, what would the widest space be to me now? Marshall is an inhabitant of this great city. We may never meet, it is true, for I am in a living wilderness—a desert of human beings; but the hope that pure accident may throw us together still supports me, and I would not exchange it for worlds. No, London is my paradise, for

it contains the single being whom my soul worships; and I am thankful that it has afforded me so peaceful an asylum."

For several weeks the order of Charlotte's existence was so regular, that the events of one day rarely differed even in the most minute detail from those of another. Mrs. Johnson keeping a maid of all-work, she had no menial offices to perform; except that she assisted in making her own bed and that of the children, and in preparing their food. In other respects, she acted towards them the part of a governess; and, as she took great pains, and they soon became attached to her, the progress that they made was such as to delight their kind-hearted parents. The consequence was, that Charlotte soon began to be treated both by Johnson and his wife as a daughter; and there came by-and-by to be but one particular about which they ever seemed disposed to fall out with her; namely, her steady refusal of all pecuniary remuneration.

"How do you think, my dear, I can reconcile this to my own conscience?" was the substance of many a remonstrance on the part of Johnson. "Here are my little ones receiving such an education as I could not get for them at the best boarding-school in Lon-

don; and you, who instruct them, positively refuse to be paid for your trouble. You would make me regret that I ever became acquainted with you, were it not that in all other instances I find you so much to my mind."

"And how could I, dear Mr. Johnson, reconcile it to my conscience, if I were to accept a farthing of money for doing that which only in part repays the obligations under which your great goodness has laid me? Remember how and where it was that our acquaintance began. I was a poor outcast, unknown, friendless, penniless, thrown under the most suspicious circumstances on your pity; and yet you took me to your home, and have treated me ever since as if I had been a child of your own. Oh, never again speak of paying for services which I feel to be infinitely less important than you have a right to require, and I to offer."

And thus it was between them frequently. But Charlotte's firmness prevailed; and even of the presents, such as a ring, a bracelet, or some other trinket, which from time to time he would have pressed upon her, she accepted only a small portion. A wardrobe, indeed, she could not refuse or decline; yet even in that she insisted that as much economy would be prac-

tised as was at all consistent with the good couple's notions of what was due to themselves.

It was Johnson's custom to give his wife and children an annual treat, by carrying them once during the Christmas holidays to witness a play and a pantomime at Drury-Lane or Covent-Garden. For reasons which have never been very satisfactorily explained, it used to be the custom, at that season of mirth, to indulge the holiday-folks with some peculiarly lugubrious piece, as a sort of set-off to the fun and frolic of the pantomime. Modern improvements have, however, broken in somewhat on that custom; so that Shakspeare's choicest plays are sometimes made to stand in the foreground of a picture, of which Mother Goose, or Jack and the Bean-Stalk, fill up the details. It chanced that at the period of this annual recreation, when the question began to be mooted on what night it would be most convenient to go, the eldest of the children, who had been reading with her governess Romeo and Juliet, discovered by a play-bill that she might, if her father were so disposed, witness its representation. To Johnson himself all plays were pretty much alike. He admired the scenery, he relished the music of the orchestra, he liked the singing; but as to the

acting, being no judge of such matters, he generally got very tired of it ere the performance came to an end. When, therefore, his daughter presented her petition, it was at once acceded to; and Charlotte became, of course, included in the number on whom the treat should be bestowed. Charlotte was nowise averse to the proposal: she doted on the play as a subject of study in private; she anticipated from the spectacle of its performance a still higher species of delight,—if, indeed, those feelings deserve to be pronounced delightful which rob us of our peace by their violence. With more of satisfaction, therefore, than she had experienced for many months, she set about the task of preparing herself and her young charges for the evening; and when the hackney-coach drove up in which they were to travel, she entered it with a step almost joyous. Neither were her sensations different when, after a considerable squeeze, she found herself seated on one of the middle rows in the pit of Covent-Garden. With all that she beheld around her she was enchanted: the spacious area, the lofty ceiling, the magnificent decorations, the brilliancy of the lights, all dazzled and confounded her; while the crash of the orchestra passed through her veins like elec-

tricity, inasmuch as this, with everything that she saw and heard, was new. But when the curtain rose and the performance began, Charlotte's whole soul was entranced: she followed the actors in every movement, she drank in every syllable as it was uttered: the tears forced themselves in streams from her eyes; and while she imagined that she was weeping over the imaginary sorrows of Juliet, it was with her own that memory was busy.

Such was Charlotte's state—a state in which her pupils to a considerable extent participated—when a sudden rush at the doors warned the experienced in such matters that half-price had begun. If Johnson's party heeded the movement at all, it was to lament that their attention should be called away even partially from the stage; for not once were their eyes withdrawn from what was before them, though the sense of hearing necessarily served them less accurately. It was not, therefore, till the drop-scene fell that the increased pressure occasioned by so excessive an influx of spectators was adverted to. Then, however, Charlotte, who had placed the children between her and their mother, while Johnson, as all good husbands ought to do, sat beside his wife, felt that she was narrowed in her room. She uttered no

complaint, well knowing that complaint would have been useless; neither did she endeavour to relieve herself by pressing upon the children; but in a gentle tone besought the individual next to her, a well-dressed female, to spare her as much as possible. The lady turned round, and presented to Charlotte's observation a strikingly beautiful countenance, except that the expression of the eye was of violent passions indulged, and the cheeks were evidently rouged.

"Spare you, ma'am! I should like to know how I can do that. Don't you see how I am squeezed up myself, like a well-sucked orange?"

"Whom have you got there, Bell?" said a voice from behind which caused every pulse in Charlotte's frame to throb. She started to her feet, turned round, saw that it was Marshall, and gasped for breath. She would have fallen indeed, had not he sprung forward to save her; for recognition took place as immediately on his part as on hers; and there was that in the circumstances of their meeting which threw even him off his guard, causing him, if not to feel, at least to act as if he felt.

"Good God, Charlotte! can I believe my senses?" said he in a whisper. "How extraordinary is all this! But for Heaven's sake

compose yourself; think where we are—be calm; this is worse than the affair of Sittingbourne a thousand-fold,—that is, we are much more public."

And Charlotte did command herself wonderfully. So complete, indeed, was the control which she exercised over her feelings, that except by the female to whom Marshall originally addressed himself, the real cause of her agitation was unobserved; for the Johnsons readily attributed the circumstance to feelings of which they had noticed the excitement, operated upon by the pressure of a great crowd and a suffocating atmosphere. As soon, therefore, as she had resumed her seat, the little bustle ceased, and the raising of the curtain sufficed to turn towards the stage eyes which, from the best motives, might have otherwise watched her by far too keenly.

But what to her was now the stage, with the mockery of grief which it exhibited! They were as nothing: she saw them not, she heard no sound except that of the low soft whisper with which Marshall assured her of his delight at seeing her again; and when he proposed that they should meet on the morrow in some place where they might converse unrestrained, her very soul spoke the assent which her lips

scarce dared to utter. It was accordingly arranged that the meeting should occur about noon, opposite to the western gate of St. Paul's; after which Marshall ceased to address her. He had given utterance to the words "God bless you!" of which, however, she took no particular heed. But when she turned her head to see whence this sudden silence arose, she found that he was gone. He had quitted the house immediately; and she again felt that she was alone.

It is not worth while to give any further account of the manner in which the evening was spent. The young people, passing lightly, as young people are wont to do, from grave to gay, laughed loud and shouted at the knocks and kicks bestowed upon the clown, and the transformations accomplished by virtue of Harlequin's wand. Neither were their parents indifferent spectators. But to Charlotte the whole thing brought misery unspeakable. She longed to be in absolute seclusion; she pined to hold converse with her own thoughts apart from all danger of interruption, and, shutting out every external object, to dwell upon the single image that ever occurred to her mind with a power that defied control. Yet, engrossed as she was with these considera-

tions, it had not escaped her notice that the female to whom Marshall had spoken did not continue to retain her place for any length of time after he went forth. On the contrary, she also had withdrawn unattended, as if some secret understanding existed between them, and the one had obeyed a signal that emanated from the other. Of course, such an idea brought with it torture of the most exquisite kind. This was a case widely different from that of the giantess. This woman was beautiful — very beautiful! Her manners, to be sure, were bold —perhaps indelicate: but what then? It might be that Marshall was of a disposition to grow weary of the meekness that characterised her own bearing, and to be permanently retained in bondage only by one who made him feel his fetters. Oh! what if it were so! what if this woman had supplanted her in his affections! The thought was madness; she could not dwell upon it and live; she forcibly expelled it from her mind, and debarred it from returning.

The long, tedious, tumultuous pantomime came to an end at last; and the Johnsons, young and old, weary and weak with laughing, prepared to return home. It was a grievous tax upon Charlotte that she was compelled not only to listen to the criticisms of her

friends, but to express, as often as appealed to, an opinion of her own; nor did she succeed in escaping from the ordeal, except by hastily stating that which changed their mirth immediately into its opposite. She said that the noise and lights had overpowered her. Yet scarcely was this done, ere she repented of the proceeding; for so completely had she won the affections of this artless family, that from the moment they learned to consider her as an invalid all their joy vanished. Not by the old people only, but by the children, one wish seemed now to be entertained, namely, that they might get home as soon as possible, and let poor Charlotte go to bed.

"Oh, mamma, I am so sorry we went to the play!" cried the eldest daughter.

"I don't think it was the play, Mary," replied her little sister; "I think it was that nasty pantomime, with the constant strumming of the fiddles, and the singing and dancing upon the stage. I am sure I wish they never would act pantomimes any more."

Charlotte was much moved by these proofs of their attachment, than which it would be hard to find in any circle greater. She had not lived long in the world, it is true; and her intercourse with society amounted to nothing:

but there was an intuitive perception of things within which told her, that no surer testimony can be borne to the depth of human love, than is afforded by the suppression of our own joy, lest it should jar against the feelings of a friend in affliction. Nor was the conviction that she possessed the unfeigned love of the little circle which regarded her as its chief ornament without a consoling influence even now. Though, therefore, her utmost exertions failed to bring back the conversation to the light and laughing tone which at first characterised it, she not only strove to withdraw from it the damp of which she had been the unwilling cause, but in some degree adopted into her own manner a portion of the gaiety which characterised theirs. Nay, nor did the charm wholly lose its influence after her head was laid on the pillow, and silence prevailed around her.

"What will to-morrow bring forth?" was the question which she naturally put, and she answered it thus:—

"I cannot tell. It may give me back that on which my heart is fixed, or it may prove to me how cruelly I have suffered my feelings to delude me; yet, in either case, ought I to despair? Oh, no, no! There are those who

care for me still. In this family I am an object of interest; why should I give up all as lost even if he abandon me?"

Had Charlotte learned in early life to pray, she would have found one more ground of confidence and consolation: and that, without doubt, aided by the thought of which she thus drew the picture, would have upheld her. But she had never learned to pray. Not even sorrow had driven her to seek for comfort in a religion which from her infancy had been, in her hearing, a constant subject of derision. Is it then to be wondered at, if all the props on which from time to time she leaned should have proved no better than reeds, and shivered in her hand?

Charlotte lay long awake, but she slept at last. Her dreams were, however, painfully vivid; and she arose next morning, feverish, anxious, nervous, excited, and uneasy.

CHAPTER VI.

RENEWED ACQUAINTANCE.

"You look ill this morning, my love," said Mrs. Johnson, when Charlotte joined her at breakfast: "I fear you have had a bad night. We must not allow one so delicate to expose herself again to the tumult and bustle of a theatre."

"I am not well," replied Charlotte; "indeed, I am much the reverse. But a solitary walk about noon will, I think, recruit me;—that is, provided I may beg the favour of you to take charge of the young people for a couple of hours."

"For the whole day, my love, if it will be of the smallest use to you. Nay, I insist upon it," continued the good woman, perceiving that Charlotte was prepared to resist the arrangement. "I know from experience what it is to exchange all at once the pure air of the country for this smoky and confined

atmosphere: so don't make any excuses to me, for I won't receive them. Spend this day exactly as you please; but the children are my charge—that's fixed, and neither argument nor entreaty shall alter the arrangement."

Charlotte could only look the thanks which she possessed no power of language to express. Neither did she so far abuse the kindness of her protectress as to resist her inclination. On the contrary, though quite indifferent as to the rest of the day, so long as an hour or two at noon were at her own disposal, she consented to leave the young folks with their mother, and retired to her own room, there to arrange her thoughts previous to the meeting in which she believed the destiny of her future life to be somehow mixed up.

When a girl of eighteen, particularly one circumstanced as was Charlotte, sits down to arrange a plan of operations in an interview which she is preparing to hold with her lover, her situation is not unlike to that of the condemned criminal, who tries to reason himself into a spirit of becoming resolution, in order that his last appearance in public may not belie the character which his previous career may have earned. If his nerves be callous, naturally callous, he may succeed in affecting

the stoic : if the contrary be the case, however magnanimous his resolutions beforehand, the immediate prospect of the gibbet is sure to scatter them into thin air. So it was with Charlotte. While alone in her room, counting the moments as they crept onward, she endeavoured to argue herself into the assumption of dignity and composure, by dwelling on the acts for which she ought to demand a full explanation, and reverting to the more than independence—to the positive comfort and respectability of the position in which she actually stood. But as the chime of quarter after quarter tolled forth by the neighbouring clock warned her how fast time was running, the rate at which her courage oozed out surprised even herself. At last it struck half-past eleven. She rose trembling and unnerved from her seat; cast a cloak round her shoulders, and drew a bonnet on her head, with hands that shook so violently as almost to defeat their own purposes; and walked abroad as weak, as pliable, and as frail, as she was when Marshall first won her heart, and established, by the abuse of his power, an absolute ascendency over her fate.

The clock of St. Paul's indicated that she was before her time by something more than

ten minutes, when Charlotte arrived at the appointed place of meeting. Marshall was not there; nor indeed, when she looked to the dial-plate, did she experience either surprise or misgiving that it was so. On the contrary, she blamed herself for her impatience, while she continued to walk to and fro, never passing beyond eye-shot of the western door of the cathedral. She had paraded her round several times, when a well-dressed man approached her.

"May I supply his place, love?" said he, as, moving forward, he extended to her his hand.

She was startled by the movement; but, in utter ignorance of what it could mean, she placed her hand in his.

"Shall I accompany you home?" was his next address, "or will you put yourself under my guidance?"

"I really have not the pleasure to know you, sir," replied Charlotte, gently disengaging her hand from that which still grasped it; "neither am I going home immediately; but if you happen to be an acquaintance of Mr. Johnson, and have seen me in his company, it will perhaps be right to tell you that I am here on private business, and that I will return as

soon as I have had a few moments' conversation with the person whom I came abroad to meet."

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt, my dear," was the answer. "Your business will be private enough, I'll warrant. But he seems very dilatory. If I were you, I'd give him the slip for once, and go with me, who will not keep you waiting."

Charlotte, though sadly puzzled what to make of this style of language, would have hazarded some rejoinder, under the impression that she was really talking to a friend of the good coachman, had not Marshall himself made his appearance. The instant her eye caught his figure, she ran towards him. Her new acquaintance, however, moved as rapidly as she did; and when she stretched out her hand to clasp that of Marshall, he abruptly threw himself between.

"No, no, young lady," said he; "not quite so fanciful as all that. One at a time, if you please. First come, first served, is a rule all the world over, you know; and I must insist upon my rights, or the deuce is in it. You go with me."

"With you?" replied Charlotte. "Why should I go with you? I never saw you in my

life till five minutes ago, and now don't know by what authority you spoke to me."

"Now that's what I call good!" exclaimed her tormentor. "Didn't I meet you here by express appointment? and am I to be fudged off at this rate, do you think?"

"Charlotte," said Marshall solemnly, "what does this mean? What am I to understand by finding you in company with a stranger?"

"I, Marshall—I in company with a stranger!" cried Charlotte. "Oh, you are mocking me! You know that I never associate with strangers; and this gentleman knows also that he spoke to me for the first time in his life just before you came up, because he saw me walking backwards and forwards as if I was waiting for somebody."

"Never mind where it was that I first spoke to you, my dear," answered the stranger; "but so far I will bear you out—I certainly spoke to you a few minutes since, because I did fancy that you were waiting for some one, and that that some one was myself."

"You!" exclaimed Charlotte. "How could I wait for you? You are a perfect stranger to me, and I presume that I am equally strange to you. This is worse than mockery."

"Well, sir," said Marshall, addressing himself to the strange gentleman, while his countenance assumed an expression which Charlotte found herself unable to interpret, "it is clear that there is some mistake. This young lady is a friend of mine. I must believe that her meeting with you has been accidental, and I must therefore beg that you will not annoy her by pressing your company where it is clearly not desired."

"If the young lady will say as much herself," answered the stranger sternly, "I will obey her; but from you, depend upon it, I will take no such order of dismissal."

"Then, sir, I tell you at once, that as I never desired to have your company, so you will oblige me much by withdrawing it," answered Charlotte proudly.

The stranger made a low bow when Charlotte ceased speaking, and walked away; not, however, without exchanging a glance of peculiar meaning with Marshall. Meanwhile the latter, drawing his companion's arm under his own, led her towards the more public thoroughfare.

"This is no fit place for our conference," said he; "we must seek one more retired. Whither shall we go?"

"Be you the guide, Marshall," said she timidly, for her heart misgave her, she scarce knew why. "London is yet strange to me; and as to private places, I have seen none such since I entered it."

"Well, then, I will take you to a spot which will bring all your country recollections fresh into your mind. But it is too distant for you to reach on foot, so we will drive thither."

He called a coach, handed Charlotte in, and desired the man to drive to the Regent's Park. The vehicle proceeded slowly; upon which he thrust his head out of the window, and in a sharp tone reproved the coachman. Yet when his orders were obeyed, and the frequent application of the lash to the horses' flanks bore testimony to the zeal of the charioteer, his good humour did not seem to return; he was silent, reserved, almost distant. Poor Charlotte could not endure this state of things many minutes; she burst into tears, and, hiding her face in her hands, sobbed audibly.

"What is the matter, Charlotte?" demanded Marshall peevishly. "We don't often meet now; but whenever we do, you contrive to make the meeting as little agreeable as possible. For my part, I have no fancy for beauty in tears."

"Then I will suppress mine as soon as I am able," replied she. "But can you wonder that I should weep? Are not my circumstances greatly changed for the worse since we first became acquainted; and have you, Marshall, treated me in all respects as I deserved? Why have you twice abandoned me? and the last time — oh, I cannot venture to think of it!"

"Was that my fault? If a glass of wine affected you so much as to render you incapable of travelling, how could I help it?" demanded Marshall. "And yet you cannot say that I abandoned you: you were penniless when you reached Sittingbourne; did not I leave you the means of following me, had you been so disposed?"

"And I did follow; though my search proved fruitless, because you neglected to give any clue by which to trace you out."

"Well, well, it 's no use wrangling," answered Marshall. "We did not meet to upbraid one another, I suppose;—a very useless mode of communication under any circumstances, and in our particular case worse than useless. You say you followed me immediately to town: where have you been living ever since, and how have you employed yourself?"

"I have been living with the kindest and best people that ever walked the earth," replied she eagerly. Oh, if you knew them, Marshall!—if you could but know how generously, how nobly they have behaved to me!"

"Indeed! and who may they be?"

"His rank in life is not very elevated, but his heart would do honour to any station; and she is as kind to me as if I were her daughter."

"Well, but who are they, and how do you recompense them for all this generosity?"

"His name is Johnson. He drives one of the Dover coaches. He found me where you left me, in utter destitution; he brought me up to town, offered me an asylum in his house, and has been to me ever since like a father. The only recompense that I could make this amiable couple, I have made: I take care of their three children, and instruct them."

"Capital!" cried Marshall, laughing loud, but, as it appeared to Charlotte, not very naturally. "This is promotion indeed! Charlotte Amos is then a nursery-governess in the family of a stage-coachman!"

"She is striving to prove herself not ungrateful to those who gave her a home when she most needed it, and were too noble-minded

to allow their better feelings to be overpowered by the worse than suspicious circumstances in which our acquaintance began."

"Be it so, love," said he, in a softer tone, after a brief pause had occurred in their conversation: "neither am I at all disposed to blame you for what has happened. Since you did accept the protection of these strangers, you were bound to make them some amends; and you have done so to such purpose, that the balance of obligation is now, I take it, on your side. However, this sort of thing won't do any longer."

"What sort of thing?" demanded Charlotte: but before he could reply, the coach stopped, and the driver indicating that they were in the Regent's Park, requested to be informed whither he should next direct his course. He was commanded to let down the steps, received his fare, and dismissed.

"Look round, Charlotte," said Marshall, after they had alighted, and had traversed a portion of the road that leads towards the Zoological Gardens: "though you see it in the dead of winter, is not this like a scene in a fairy-land?"

"It is indeed most beautiful," replied she, as she gazed with delighted eye over the wood

and water, the sloping uplands and smooth green lawns, by which that fairest of suburban landscapes is diversified. "And these houses, surely they must belong to the great men of the land? each resembles a palace."

"How should you like to live here?" demanded Marshall.

"If with you," replied she, "it would be a paradise; if without you, I could take no pleasure in it."

"Dearest Charlotte," said he, pressing her hand affectionately, "this is no time to hold back from you a knowledge of the truth. You have seen me of late under such new and extraordinary circumstances, that to refrain from unbosoming myself, even though the tale must shock you, would indicate a total want of confidence on my part in your firmness and affection.—I am in such difficulties, that from day to day, and from hour to hour, my very life is threatened. Speculations in which I engaged too rashly have failed. Negotiations which I was carrying on, so help me Heaven! with the most upright and honest views, have taken such a turn as to render me a suspected traitor; and I am now skulking about, as you find me, to avoid an arrest, which would certainly lead to a trial, and probably to a public execu-

tion. Still, I am not without friends—great and powerful friends. But the great require constant stimulating. No man need expect to possess their favour long, who is not in a condition to promote either their interests or their pleasures. Now I cannot, circumstanced as I am, promote any man's interests; I do not know that I can administer to any one's pleasures. What I want, therefore, is the assistance of some being who would act with me and for me, without hesitating as to the means, so long as the end were obtained, of securing the steady and cheerful assistance of one who, if he be willing, possesses ample power to set me square with the world. Am I counting too much on your love, when I ask you to devote yourself for a time to my preservation; so that, when the cloud passes away, we may be able to spend the remainder of our lives together?"

"Have I any desire for life, except that it may be devoted to your service?" demanded the impassioned girl. "Only say how I can promote your welfare, and there is nothing that I will not attempt—there are no privations to which I will not submit, in order to accomplish that purpose."

"Ay, but the sort of sacrifice which I am

going to require at your hands is something on which, I venture to say, you have never counted; and yet, if it be not made, the consequences may be terrible."

"What is it, Marshall?" cried she eagerly; "speak out, and do not fear my willing and cheerful acquiescence. If by performing the most menial offices I can forward your views, to me the offices will be full of dignity. If by personal labour I can deliver you from your difficulties, I will work till this body fail, and die happy in the thought that life was sacrificed for you. Speak out, then,—tell me what it is you wish; and be assured that, if my powers extend so far, you shall not be denied."

"Charlotte," said he with great solemnity, while he stopped and fixed his large dark eye on hers; "do you love with such unbounded devotion, as that you are ready to obey my wishes even though they revolt against all the prejudices which you may have cherished from your infancy?"

"Can you doubt it?" replied she: "Have I not given proof enough how lightly character, reputation, and the world's esteem, weighed against the wishes of him to whom I had given my heart."

"Well, then, I will speak out at once. You see that large house among the trees? it is owned by the noble friend of whom I have spoken, and on whose exertions all my prospects depend. He has seen, and passionately admires you;—nay, don't start, my sweet love,—I do not ask you to give your heart to the keeping of any one except myself; that is mine, and mine only. But, under our circumstances—when we cannot live together—when my fortunes, my rank in society, my life itself, depend on conciliating a particular person; and above all, when I give my consent—nay, when I beg of you, as a favour done to myself, that you would overcome your own scruples, pledging my honour that when the fitting time comes you shall be released from bondage, and taken to the arms of one who will only love you the more for what you have undergone,—I do think that, under these circumstances, your consenting to live with him for a few months, or at the most a single year, could not lower you in your own estimation, as it will certainly not sink you in mine. What say you, dearest? I await your decision with an anxiety which I have no words to express."

"That this is indeed a blow for which I was not prepared," answered the unhappy girl,

withdrawing her arm from that of Marshall, and letting her head drop on her bosom. "Oh, I have dreamed of much—much of misery and degradation! I have seen myself an outcast and a beggar; dragging out existence for a while by asking alms of strangers, and dying at last in the kennel: but to have such a proposal made to me, and by you, Marshall!—Oh, I never, never thought it would come to this!"

"Then you will not comply with my request?" demanded Marshall sternly: "you are too pure to keep house for a nobleman of the first rank, as your mother kept house for a Kentish yeoman, even though by doing so you might acquire ample wealth for yourself, and put me in a position to marry you when your term of bondage was over?"

"How am I fallen! how have I been deceived!" exclaimed Charlotte, with more of energy than she had yet displayed. "I tell you no, Marshall! not to save your life would I stoop so low! By passion, by misplaced affection, I may have been misled; but to become an object of barter—No, no, no! rather let me perish!"

She turned from him as she spoke, and had walked several paces back in the direction from which they came, ere he recovered from the

surprise with which her firmness had affected him. He followed, however, and was not slow in overtaking her.

"Can you believe, Charlotte, that I was in earnest?" cried he, while he took her unresisting hand, and again placed it under his arm. "Do you imagine that I had any other object in view than to try you? Consider where it was that we met last night—consider how you were occupied when I joined you this morning—and then ask yourself whether I had not reason to be uneasy on your account, and anxious on my own. The pit of a theatre is not the place where modest women usually resort; neither is it customary to shake hands and converse familiarly with strangers. I could not put the question to you directly, whether you had become one of those degraded things that walk the streets and live by their shame; yet it was necessary for my own peace that I should discover whether there was ground even for suspicion. I am now satisfied that there is none; and you—surely you know me too well to suppose that I could ever become a party to the total ruin of one to whom my troth has been so long plighted?"

Alas! there is no creature so confiding, so credulous, as the woman who has once "loved

too well." Forced as this explanation would have appeared to any one else, in Charlotte's view it was satisfactory; and she wept for joy as she accepted it, and sealed their reconciliation with a kiss. It was accordingly settled between them that they should meet frequently. She gave him her address, to which he promised to write as soon as he should be in a condition to fix a spot for another interview; and having conducted her as far as the corner of the street in which she dwelt, Marshall took his leave.

CHAPTER VII.

NEW PROSPECTS.

THREE days elapsed from the date of the conversation detailed above, ere the postman brought any communication for Charlotte. They were to the poor girl days of indescribable anxiety and excitement. A knock never came to the door without causing her to start; she calculated the moments between one period of delivery and another; and her general manner became so vacant, and at times so depressed, as to arouse both the regrets and the misgivings of her protectors. Mrs. Johnson, indeed, repeatedly questioned her as to the cause of so remarkable a change of behaviour, and received on each occasion the same evasive reply, that it was brought about entirely by illness; while the children, seeing her frequently in tears, shed so many themselves, that their little eyes often told a tale which their lips had not spoken. At last, however,

the long-looked-for epistle came, and Charlotte flew to devour it in her own apartment. It was brief, but not cold; and it desired her to meet the writer the same evening at eight o'clock, at the place where they had met before. Charlotte would have greatly preferred a meeting in daylight, because, inexperienced as she was, it could not fail to strike her, that the fact of her going out at night—a practice in which she had never indulged—must operate unfavourably on the minds of the Johnsons. Nevertheless, as Marshall's wishes were in this, and in everything besides, a law to her, she did not for a moment doubt as to the course which it would be necessary to pursue. She informed Mrs. Johnson of the necessity under which she lay of meeting a friend; and Mrs. Johnson, though she looked as if she regretted, did not utter a syllable in contradiction of the proceeding.

Punctual to the minute which he had himself specified, Marshall awaited her arrival in St. Paul's Church-yard. As he had done on a previous occasion, moreover, he proposed that they should remove to some place where they were less likely to attract observation; for, besides that the moon shone clear overhead, the glare of the gas-lights was of itself sufficient to ex-

pose the working of each person's countenance to such as chose to make strange faces their study. When, however, she reminded him that a protracted absence from home must, at this hour, tell against her with the Johnsons, he so far yielded to her wishes, that he contented himself by leading her round to the north side of the building, where, as there is no thoroughfare for carriages, few lamps have been set up. They had not been long in comparative darkness, ere, reverting to the reason which she had assigned for not wishing to proceed further, he asked her how she really liked her situation.

"How can I fail to like it?" replied she; "the Johnsons are everything that is kind and good, and the debt of gratitude which I owe them is one that I will never be able to pay."

"Nay, Charlotte," replied he, "there you take a wrong view of the case. That debt is more than paid already. Didn't you tell me that you had not received either salary or wages since you entered the family?"

"That may be," answered Charlotte; "but it has been my own fault entirely. They have repeatedly expressed a wish to pay for my services; but how could I accept money from

people that gave me a home when all the world besides had rejected me?"

"Now, don't imagine that I am going to quarrel with what is past, far less to put a wrong construction on the behaviour of your friends; but you must allow me, as one who takes a deeper interest in your welfare than anybody else, to have my own opinions on these points, and to offer such advice as I think your peculiar position requires. You have now been upwards of three months with this worthy couple, and they themselves admit that they have gained at least as much by you as you have gained by them. I think, therefore, that the time has come when you may, without any breach of propriety, or offering any violence to their feelings or your own, look a little to the side of your own interests. Remember that, situated as you now are, you do nothing towards securing a permanent provision for yourself. Suppose Mr. Johnson were to die, what would become of you? his widow would probably not think of educating her children as they are educated now, and you would be thrown upon the world again as a beggar. No, Charlotte, this sort of thing won't do much longer; you must look out for a better place, and I must help you to find it."

"What!" cried Charlotte, "abandon my preservers just as I am beginning to make myself serviceable to them? No, no, Marshall; you would not advise that."

"Certainly I would not advise your abandoning them," answered he; "if, as I presume, you mean leaving them in the lurch. But they are too much attached to you, I am convinced, to think of opposing their own views to a consideration of your permanent welfare. If, for example, a situation were to offer as under-governess, or even as lady's-maid, in some rich family, where you would be treated with as much kindness as by the Johnsons, and receive over and above a handsome salary, I am sure your friends would never forgive either you or themselves, if they thought that any motives of delicacy hindered you from accepting it; and, as far as you are yourself concerned, I know that you would do very wrong to hesitate."

"Well, well," said Charlotte, smiling, "when such a thing is in my power, it will be time enough to think how it behoves me to deal with it. In the mean while, as I see no chance of a girl unknown, and unprotected, like myself, attracting the notice of any fine lady, I am quite content to remain where I am,

and to contribute all in my power to the happiness of my benefactors."

"Perhaps you leap too soon to your conclusions, my love," replied Marshall: "it does not always follow, in this great town, that persons unknown and unprotected fail of making their way into great people's families. What if it were in my power to offer you a situation now, where all, and more than all, the advantages I have hinted at would attend you?"

"I hope that it is not in your power to make the offer, dear Marshall," answered Charlotte, timidly; "because it would give me almost equal pain to accept or to reject it. I could not do the one without suffering the bitter reproaches of my own heart; and I could not, I am afraid, do the other without offending you."

"Nay, now, Charlotte, this is worse than the dream of a romancer, a thousand times. Why should your own heart reproach you for doing that of which your best friends must approve? But, to be sure, if you prefer remaining where you are, to contributing something towards the establishment of such an order of things as may eventually enable us

to live entirely for one another, I have not one word to say against it."

"What is it you would have me do, Marshall?" cried Charlotte doubtingly: "whither is it you would have me remove?"

"I would have you go to-morrow, and present yourself at number —, Grosvenor-square, and deliver this letter to the porter. It is addressed, as you will see, to the Countess of Beddington, and comes from one of her most intimate friends, recommending the bearer as a fit person to act in the capacity of lady's-maid. The countess is a good-natured, easy person, who will doubtless send for you, ask you a few questions as to where you were born and how educated, and then place you in her establishment at once: for it is a peculiarity of hers, that she prefers young, unsophisticated girls from the country, to women that may have lived with other patronesses. You need not say anything about the Johnsons, for that wouldn't tell in your favour; neither need you make her ladyship aware how long it is since you quitted Waltham: but lead her to suppose that you came to town only as it were yesterday, in consequence of the receipt of a letter from Lady Olivia Dugdale;—now don't forget the

name,—Lady Olivia Dugdale, whom your mother nursed, and who has taken a lively interest in you and your brothers and sisters in consequence. When you have thus received your admission into Grosvenor-square, you can go back for your trunk, and bid the Johnsons fare well. But mind you don't tell them where you are going; and, above all things, keep your countenance, and be very well read in your story. You will find the situation an excellent one."

"But, dear Marshall," replied Charlotte, "how can I do all this? I am not the person in whose favour this letter has been written; how can I go and palm myself off as that which I am not? and if I were to succeed, how long do you think could the secret be kept? The young woman whose testimonials you bid me use would not fail to confront me; and then in what plight should I stand?"

"Charlotte, unless you wish that you and I should cease at once to have any further correspondence, you will permit yourself to be guided in this case by my judgment. Am I urging you to incur any personal hazard? the girl for whom this letter was written has gone abroad with a different family, and will not return these three years; there cannot, there-

fore, be the slightest risk of any such collision as you seem to dread. And as to the wrong put upon others, what is it? you slip in to supply the place of one who is otherwise provided for. Your manners, your appearance, your acquirements, your conversation, are a thousand times more likely to please the countess than hers; and as you accept the trust with the full determination of discharging its duties to the letter, are not all parties benefited—is any one injured?"

"Oh, but is it not a deceit, a practical deceit, from first to last?—and the poor Johnsons——"

"Curse the Johnsons! I tell you they have made more than the worth of their hospitality out of you long ago; and were it otherwise, the choice before you is this,—whether you are to quit them, or discard me. And as to the deceit, dear girl, are you so very young as to be ignorant that the whole system of society is one continued deceit?"

"Pray, pray, don't urge me!" exclaimed the agitated girl.

"Nay, Charlotte," answered he, "I will not urge you; for I see that the influence which I once had over you is gone. Act as you please; go where you will, and leave me to perish."

"Will nothing but my compliance in this particular satisfy you?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, what a wretched creature I am! However, you are the lord of my existence: do with me what you will, direct me where you choose—I have no power except to obey."

It is not necessary to pursue the dialogue further. All Charlotte's scruples gave way before the eloquence of one who never pleaded except to her heart; and she now accepted the letter, after promising to use it as had been explained, at an early hour on the following morning. Fearful, however, lest one so unskilled in such matters might forget or misapprehend her part, Marshall made it his business, throughout the whole of their homeward walk, to repeat over and over again the directions which he had already given. He made Charlotte, moreover, rehearse her part till she seemed, even to his suspicious mind, to be perfect; and left her close to the door which was so soon to be closed upon her for ever. She entered, but it was with the stealthy tread of one whose conscience is not at ease. She would have passed on, likewise, to her sleeping-room at once, had not Mrs. Johnson

detained her—not to reproach, not even to question her, but to advise that she should not again make appointments after dark. Alas! Charlotte could not so much as raise her eyes to meet the compassionate, rather than the angry, glances which her benefactress was directing towards her. But after a brief delay, during which she scarcely spoke a word except to notice the statement that to-morrow was Mr. Johnson's day at home, she took up a candle and wished her friend good-night.

"God bless you, my love!" said Mrs. Johnson, putting her arm round Charlotte's neck; "don't fancy that I am either offended with you, or distrust you; but you are too young, and too ignorant of the bad ways of London, to trust yourself alone in the streets after dark; and I hope you will not again be under the necessity of doing so."

Charlotte did not reply, for her heart was too full. She ran up stairs, and throwing herself, dressed as she was, upon the bed, gave way to a chain of reflection which was far from consolatory. What was she about to do? and under whose guidance was she preparing to take a step which, even if undetected, must sink her in her own esteem, and in that of the very man who advised it? For, destitute

as she was of all religious principle, and fallen in one respect beneath her sex's pity, there had always been about Charlotte Amos an instinctive love of truth, which rendered its opposite at once difficult and odious to her. Perhaps, too, it was this very constitutional reverence for truth that had rendered her so completely the dupe of one who held it utterly at nought. Unaccustomed herself to deceive, she did not dream of suspecting others, particularly those whom she loved, of deceiving; and hence, without doubt, the excessive credulity which led her to credit every tale, no matter how improbable, of which Marshall was the author. But now, not even her love for him could blind her to the fact that she was become at his desire a party in an intrigue. How her bosom heaved as she thought of this! how her mind revolted at the idea of so much baseness, of so much falsehood!—yet she felt that the die was cast. When she laid her head on the pillow, therefore, it was with the melancholy consciousness awakened, that henceforth she must be an object of contempt to herself: and that reflection, it is scarcely necessary to add, has no tendency to make any one's slumbers refreshing.

Charlotte awoke early, and still the hideous

thought of what must happen stood foremost to her view. She had concealed the letter in a drawer over-night, and she now drew it forth and examined the superscription over and over, as if it had contained some secret meaning different from that which the words conveyed. This done, she forced herself to conjure up the scene of which Marshall had described the outlines, and to rehearse with great care the part which had been assigned to herself. Marshall had advised her to proceed to Grosvenor-square about one o'clock: it was the hour of play for the young people, so she was not obliged to deprive them of another lesson; and, strange as it may appear, the reflection proved agreeable to her. At the appointed hour, therefore, she did go forth, and in due time stood opposite to the gate of Lady Beddington's mansion. She knocked timidly, was admitted, delivered her credentials, and sat down upon a bench in the hall. Three or four servants in livery were lounging about, and a tradesman or two seemed waiting for an audience; yet such was Charlotte's agitation, that she neither heard the somewhat flippant remarks that escaped them, nor took any notice of the scrutiny which they bestowed upon her. At last a lackey descended the stairs with an order that the young

person who had brought the letter would walk up. Charlotte was just sufficiently mistress of herself to comprehend the design of the message, and to obey; but when the servant ushered her through two ante-rooms, both of them gorgeously furnished, into an inner apartment or boudoir, beside a table in the centre of which Lady Beddington was writing, her resolution entirely failed: she trembled from head to foot, and would have fallen, had not the countess with great good-humour desired her to sit.

"You are the young person that brought me this letter?" said the lady, applying a glass to one of her bright hazel eyes.

Charlotte could only bow her answer, for her throat was parched, and her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth.

"I see you are a good deal agitated, child," continued the really handsome and kind-hearted countess: "pray compose yourself. Lady Olivia tells me that you are quite a rustic, though a well-educated one,—and your appearance bespeaks both. How long is it since you have seen Lady Olivia,—or have you ever seen her?"

Charlotte could only stammer out a negative, which, as the truth always does, rose naturally

to her lips: and it so happened that in this instance truth did as well as falsehood.

"Ah, very well, Lucy;—your name is Lucy, I see—is it not?"

Again Charlotte bowed.

"Well, Lucy, I won't ask you any questions now. I have unbounded confidence in the judgment and discretion of your patroness, and am ready to give you a fair trial; so you may consider yourself as admitted from this day upon my establishment. Have you any luggage?—I suppose you are just from the country, and have left it at the coach-office. Tell the porter where it is, and desire him to send for it. In the mean while, ring that bell, and the servant will give you in charge of the housekeeper, who will treat you well."

"If your ladyship pleases," stammered out Charlotte, "I should like to go for it myself: I have a cousin in town."

"Oh, very well, just as you please; only the sooner you take up your residence here, the sooner you will feel yourself at home. But go for your luggage, by all means."

Charlotte did not wait for a second command, but curtseying to the ground, quitted the room. The next movement was of course to Coleman-street.

CHAPTER VIII.

RESULTS OF SKILFUL MANAGEMENT.

CHARLOTTE's mind was a perfect chaos as she hurried along the streets. The Rubicon was indeed passed — of that she could no longer doubt; though, of the important consequences that were likely to follow, it was impossible to form an anticipation. One of these, however, did force itself into notice, because it was immediate. She must bid farewell to the Johnsons, and at a moment's warning withdraw herself from the society of persons to whom her heart told her that she owed more than to any other human beings. Nor was it only by thus abruptly withdrawing herself from beneath their roof that she must lacerate their feelings. She stood pledged to conceal from them the nature of the situation which she had accepted, as well as the name and address of the lady with whom she was henceforth to live; and the thought of thus wounding their delicacy at the

last gave a bitterness to the anticipated separation such as had well-nigh overpowered her. "Suppose she were to sacrifice her little stock of wearing apparel, and take leave of her friends by letter only," that would doubtless save the feelings of both parties; but how would it answer in reference to Lady Beddington? She had gone avowedly to bring her luggage from the coach-office; if she returned empty-handed, what would be thought of her? No: she must see the Johnsons; she must entreat them to extend to her so much of confidence still, as to believe that her removal was an arrangement drawn on by necessity, and that the reserve in which for the present her motives were wrapped up, was not less compulsory. Fortune, however, seemed for once resolved to extricate from a dilemma one whom she had often treated scurvily. When Charlotte reached home, she found that the Johnsons had gone out with the children, and that they were not expected to return till the evening. Hastily, therefore, she packed up her wardrobe; and leaving a farewell letter on the table, in which she expressed her most earnest wishes for their prosperity, she desired the maid to call a coach, and to put her trunk into it.

"Be you going to leave us, miss?" said the

wench, as Charlotte stepped into the vehicle. But no answer was awarded; indeed the heart of the fugitive was too full to reply. The coachman drove off a little way: "Where to, ma'am?" She told him; and in ten minutes she was set down in Grosvenor-square; in ten minutes more, under the especial protection of the housekeeper.

Before she laid her head upon the pillow, Charlotte was fully initiated into all the mysteries of her calling. Lady Beddington needed her assistance before dinner, and at two in the morning required to be undressed again. These were new and trying hours for Charlotte; yet there was a kindness about her lady, an air of perfect trust and confidence, which made her feel that, were the conscience at peace, her situation would soon become agreeable in the extreme; for Lady Beddington, like many other persons in her station of life, though gay and volatile, was the reverse of selfish. From inadvertency she might perhaps inflict an occasional wound on the feelings of her inferiors—from design never: indeed, her chief error seemed to be, that acting always a natural part herself, she could not suspect those about her of hypocrisy. The consequence was, that her domestics and dependants were treated with

a liberality which they could scarcely be expected never to abuse. To the housekeeper the care of the table was entrusted, and the uncontrolled management of all domestic concerns; to the lady's-maid, a perfect control over the wardrobe, jewel-box, and the bureau,—for even of the latter, in which her most valued correspondence was laid up, the keys were given in charge to a menial. Charlotte wondered at what her previous habits taught her to regard as excessive carelessness; yet she accepted the trust without hesitation, being fully satisfied that by her it would never be abused.

It was about noon on the very day after her establishment in Grosvenor-square, that Charlotte received an intimation that her brother was in the housekeeper's room below, and desired to see her. For an instant the inclination to deny that she had a brother in town stood uppermost in her thoughts; but it was only for an instant, for the conviction that Marshall had assumed this character in order to command frequent access to her immediately swept it away. She hurried down stairs, and entering the apartment by a door towards which her visitor's back chanced to be turned, found an opportunity, ere he was aware of her presence, to take a rapid survey of his exterior. The effect of that survey

had well-nigh been to drive her back to her own room without speaking; for the dress, figure, and attitude of her visitor were all so strange, that she felt convinced of having been misled by her own imagination. There stood before her a young man, whose air seemed to demonstrate that he had been brought up entirely in a farm-yard, and was without an idea except such as a farm-yard may produce. His dress was a clean white smock-frock that reached to the ankles, a pair of strong heavy boot-shoes, a Belcher handkerchief, a yellow striped waistcoat, and a broad-brimmed coarse hat, which he carried in his hand. His hair, also, was of a totally different colour from that of Marshall; and his bearing generally, if not loutish, at all events was the reverse of sprightly. Nor was the effect very different when, turning round, he displayed a countenance smooth, ruddy, and considerably more youthful than that on which she had gazed too often and too affectionately. So complete indeed was the disguise, that she had actually retreated a step backwards, when the countryman spoke, and the tones of his voice at once betrayed him.

"Is it so perfect, Charlotte?" demanded Marshall with a smile; "am I so thoroughly transformed, that even the eye of love fails to detect me?"

"Good heavens, Marshall!" exclaimed Charlotte, "what does this mean? Why do I see you here, and see you thus?"

"You see me here, love," replied he, putting his arm round her waist, and clasping one of her hands in his, "because I did not place you where you are in order that you might be beyond the reach of our meeting; and you see me thus, because it is not prudent for me to go abroad except in the shade. Have I succeeded in disguising myself?"

"So completely, that, had you not spoken, I should have gone away fully persuaded that I had been sent for by mistake."

Marshall smiled again, as he observed the sort of half-doubtful glances with which she still continued to regard him, and then went on to inquire how she liked her situation. "You find your lady all that I predicted," continued he,—"good-natured, unsuspicious, credulous, and easy to manage? You have already, I doubt not, got possession of her keys, and been installed as mistress of the wardrobe. I am sure you must now be convinced, that in reasoning you out of so many foolish scruples I did you the most essential service."

"I wish that I could feel so," replied Charlotte. "To be sure, I have made a covenant

with myself, that in no instance shall my lady find cause to regret having taken into her service one whom she never meant to engage; and so far the result may prove to her at least harmless. But can I ever cease to remember that I owe my situation to deceit, and that throughout every day I retain it the deceit is continued?"

"And what then, dear girl?" asked Marshall tenderly. "If persons be deceived into arrangements advantageous to themselves, have the deceivers any just ground of self-reproach? Lady Beddington will never suffer wrong at your hands;—nay, you are in every respect better qualified to wait upon her than the person whom you represent. Is not she, then, a gainer as well as you?"

"Perhaps so, Marshall; yet I am not the less a deceiver."

"Pooh, pooh! you must get over these weaknesses. Now tell me, how are you accommodated—how are you lodged?"

"Far better in every respect than I deserve. I have a commodious sleeping-apartment to myself, and I live with the housekeeper."

"And your duties comprehend what?"

"Dressing and waiting upon my lady, and taking charge of her jewels and apparel."

"She is rich in jewels, I suppose?" asked he carelessly.

"Very. I am no judge of these matters; but there are diamonds in one casket alone, which, as she told me herself, could not be purchased for several thousand pounds."

"How beautiful they must be, Charlotte! There is nothing in nature I admire so much as diamonds. The glitter of these precious stones dwells upon my imagination long after the vision has passed away, and carries me into a world of romance, where I live and am happy. How I should like to see the contents of that casket!"

"How I wish that all your desires could be as easily gratified. Wait here two minutes, and as my lady happens to be sitting at this moment to a portrait-painter, so is not likely to call for me, I will fetch the casket."

She ran up stairs, was absent but a few seconds, and returned again with a box, of which the key was suspended from a narrow ribbon that encircled her own neck. She unlocked and handed it to Marshall, who drew out a necklace, bracelets, ear-rings, and ornaments for the hair, on which he gazed with a degree of rapture which amused as much as it surprised his companion.

"Can the human mind conceive anything more gorgeous, more exquisitely lovely!" cried he, enraptured.

As he spoke, the hat which he continued to hold in his hand escaped from his grasp, and fell. He stooped to pick it up, turning his face away for a single moment from Charlotte; and when he rose again, shut down the lid of the casket violently, and demanded the key.

"Let me lock these treasures up," said he; "let me relieve my eyes from beholding them. They dazzle too much;—they make me mad."

"What a strange humour!" replied Charlotte laughing, while at the same time she handed him the key. "Now to me such things have no charms: it would not add to my happiness one tittle, were all the diamonds that ever came from the East poured into my lap to-morrow."

"Take care of these, however," answered Marshall; "for they are very, very precious. And now, love, good-b'ye: to-morrow, or next day at the latest, we shall probably meet again. In the mean while, get rid of your scruples as fast as possible; do your duty to Lady Beddington, as I am sure you will; and let us both look forward to the day when, the difficulties that surround us being surmounted, we may be

able to become all to one another, and to spend the evening of our lives together."

Charlotte's eyes filled with tears as she returned the embrace with which he took leave of her; but no drop stained her cheek. On the contrary, she felt cheered and enlivened more than she had yet done since the commencement of her misfortunes; and having watched his figure till the hall-door closed upon it, she ran up stairs, replaced the casket in the drawer from which she had taken it, and betook herself to her customary employments.

"You don't speak French, child, do you?" asked Lady Beddington, as Charlotte was arranging her hair preparatory to the reception of a dinner-party.

"A little, my lady," was the reply: "I was chiefly educated in a French convent, where I acquired some knowledge of the language."

"Well, now, I thought so," replied her lady; "I was sure you did not learn to dress hair in England. I declare, you are a perfect mistress of the art: you shall supply the place of Mons. De la Ville to-morrow, and prepare me entirely for the drawing-room."

Charlotte was gratified of course, though too modest not to shrink from so serious a responsibility. But her lady was firm; and when

the morrow came, the skill of the handmaid was called into play. It delighted the good-natured countess, who scarcely withdrew her eyes from the large mirror before which she sat, to desire that a young person who requested an audience might wait till her toilet was complete.

"I really do not know how I shall be able to thank Lady Olivia," said she, "for sending me so invaluable an attendant as you, Lucy. I declare that I was never so well dressed in my life. Now, what ornaments would you recommend me to wear? There are the pearls, the diamonds——"

"If I might venture to advise," replied Charlotte, finding the countess stop short, "I would suggest that your ladyship had better wear the diamonds; they are so very beautiful, and will suit the style of this robe so exactly."

"Upon my honour, your taste is equal to your skill, Lucy. Go, fetch the diamonds, then, and we will try how they look."

Charlotte ran to her drawer, brought forth the casket, and applied the key to the lock.

"The wreath will come in so well!" said she, raising the lid; but how it was to come in, her lady was not informed;—a shrill cry, on the contrary, and the falling of the casket on the

floor, warned her that her attendant had met with some sudden shock.

"Good God! what is the matter, child?" cried the countess, starting up; "you frighten me out of my senses."

"Gone!" shrieked Charlotte; "the diamonds gone; and yet I never permitted the key—"

"What!" repeated the countess, "the diamonds gone! The thing is impossible—quite out of the question. Be calm, my dear; don't alarm yourself unnecessarily. Depend upon it, you will find them in the drawer, or in some other place, where possibly they may have been placed by your careless predecessor after they had last been in use. Go and search for them; and in the mean while desire the young woman that waits below to come up. You will find them, depend upon it; and as we are in excellent time, I can as well hear what this person has to say before I am dressed, as after.

Charlotte obeyed, though without the faintest hope that her lady's anticipations would be realized. She knew that they had been in the casket when she brought it down for Marshall's inspection; and a suspicion so hideous forced itself upon her mind, that all other ideas became obliterated. Was it within the range of possibility that Marshall had abstracted them?

Was it credible that she had been the dupe throughout of one so heartless, so utterly depraved, as to consummate the many wrongs that he had done her already by such an act as this? She raised her hand to her forehead,—pressed it violently,—opened her eyes to their utmost stretch,—shook her head,—and then stood rooted to the floor as if she had been a statue. No external object made any longer the faintest impression on her senses. Her lady's bell rang with violence: she did not hear it. There was the noise of feet passing rapidly along the passage outside her room: she was quite unconscious of the circumstance. Nay, the door of her room opened, and the housekeeper entering, walked forward towards the spot on which she was standing without being noticed. At last a violent shake by the shoulder was given, which hardly sufficed to break the spell.

"You are wanted in my lady's dressing-room immediately," was the message; and Charlotte obeyed it without speaking. It seemed, however, as if the atmosphere of Lady Beddington's closet contained some healing powers; for she scarce passed the threshold, ere her senses returned, and she saw that the countess was not alone. There stood near her a young wo-

man, modest, perhaps awkward, in her deportment, whose cheek, as well as that of the lady, was flushed, as if some deeply interesting conversation had passed between them.

"Come forward, child!" cried the countess, in a firmer tone than she had yet used when addressing her handmaid; "come forward and clear up a mystery which it surpasses my power to penetrate. Here is a young woman who tells me that her name is Lucy Filmer, and brings me a duplicate letter from Lady Olivia Dugdale, containing the same sort of recommendation with that which I got from you. She says that she had another letter, which she lost, she does not know how; that she would have been here three days ago but for that circumstance, and that she has been detained till now waiting for the credentials which are there upon the table. Now it is quite clear that one or other of you must be an impostor; and I desire to know which."

"I am the impostor, my lady!" exclaimed Charlotte, casting herself on her knees before the countess,—"I am the impostor; do with me what you will. Oh, I have been cruelly, cruelly duped,—cruelly, cruelly abused; yet am I a guilty creature for all that, and deserve neither mercy nor pity. The diamonds, too, are gone!

Send me to prison,—send me to trial,—send me to death!"

As she uttered these words, the unfortunate creature fell upon her face to the ground. But the countess, though a kind-hearted woman, was likewise a woman of the world. She could not believe that all this feeling was genuine; she concluded, as in her circumstances any other person would have done, that it was assumed for the purpose of working on her humanity, and so screening the culprit from punishment. She therefore desired the housekeeper to send immediately for a policeman, and to put the impostor, in the mean while, under charge of one of the footmen, so that she might not effect her escape.

"You are an admirable actress, young woman," said she to Charlotte; "but I am not so young as to be imposed upon. I have a public duty to perform, and depend upon it I will perform it; so, be so obliging as to rise and place yourself in that corner of the room till the servant comes."

Charlotte obeyed by a sort of instinct, and withdrew to the far corner of the room without uttering a syllable. There she stood,—her eyes fixed and glassy, her cheek deadly pale, and her hair, which the fall had cast loose from its

fastenings, streaming over her shoulders,—the very image of what she was—a creature totally undone. That reason itself did not fail, is indeed the only matter to be wondered at; for hope was entirely extinct, and reason rarely survives its extinction. Nor was her behaviour different when the footman entered and took her into custody. She followed him, as a sheep follows the shepherd, to the hall: he gave her over to the policeman, who took her in charge, unresisting, uncomplaining. Before the magistrate, also, her manner underwent no change; for she never opened her lips either to deny or to admit the crime with which she stood charged.—It is needless to dwell longer upon such details: a clear case of imposture and robbery was made out against her; and Charlotte, who had risen that morning from her bed in a palace, passed the night a prisoner in one of the cells of Newgate.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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